

Annan set for Mideast tour next month

UNITED NATIONS (AFP) — U.N. Secretary General Kofi Annan is to visit Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria next month, on his first Middle East tour, a U.N. spokesman said Friday. U.N. spokesman Juan Carlos Brandt announced at a news briefing here that Mr. Annan would also visit areas under the jurisdiction of the Palestinian National Authority (PNA) during his tour, set for the "second week of February." In addition to discussing U.N. issues and the U.N. role in the region with political leaders, Mr. Annan is to visit U.N. peacekeeping missions, as well as the headquarters of the U.N. Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) in the Gaza Strip.

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Israeli prime minister declares he proposed one troop pullback instead of three amidst plans to build 30,000 new settlement units

PNA says Ross visit achieved 'zero, there were no results'

TEL AVIV (AP) — Israel will only carry out one troop pullback in the West Bank instead of the three it promised the Palestinians in a U.S.-backed accord, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said in an interview published Friday.

Mr. Netanyahu's government also revealed tentative plans to build 30,000 new units in Jewish settlements in the West Bank and Gaza Strip by 2002, or enough to double the Jewish population in the areas claimed by the Palestinians for a future state.

In Jerusalem, meanwhile, Israeli security forces were on alert for attacks by Islamist or Jewish extremists. Hundreds of troops, some on horseback, patrolled the streets as tens of thousands of worshippers prayed at Al Aqsa Mosque to mark the second Friday of the fasting month of Ramadan.

U.S. President Bill Clinton's Mideast envoy prepared Friday to wrap up a four-day shuttle mission that failed to produce a breakthrough. The envoy, Dennis Ross, had been trying to prepare the ground for separate President Clinton meetings later this month with Mr. Netanyahu and Palestinian President Yasser Arafat.

However, Mr. Netanyahu, who is under pressure from hardliners in his ruling coalition, made no signs of budging from his tough positions. Mr. Netanyahu

has said he would announce the scope of a troop pullback before he leaves for his Jan. 20 meeting with President Clinton, but that the withdrawal would only be carried out several months later, and only if the Palestinians fulfilled their security obligations, such as cracking down on armed Islamists and reducing the size of their security force.

In a year-old accord backed by the United States, Israel had promised to carry out three pullbacks by mid-1998. The Palestinians rejected Israel's first offer of 2 per cent in March as insufficient, and the second pullback is two months overdue.

In an interview with the Maariv daily published Friday, Mr. Netanyahu said there would only be one withdrawal.

"You can't ask us to fulfil all our commitments concerning the pullbacks when they [the Palestinians] haven't fulfilled a single one of their commitments," Mr. Netanyahu said.

"So I proposed an agreement in which we will carry out one pullback, and the rest of the territory will be handed over as part of the final status agreement," he said.

The U.S. has insisted in the past that Israel carry out all three pullbacks. The Palestinians, who now have full or partial control over 27 per cent of the West Bank, expect to get another



Palestinians stage a protest on their land confiscated by Israeli Jewish settlers near Naveh Dakaalim settlement at Khan Yunis city in Gaza Strip Friday. Israel deployed thousands of troops in Jerusalem and throughout the country in a massive security operation following threats of attacks by both Palestinian and Israeli extremists (Reuters photo)

60 per cent of the land in the three withdrawals, including 40 per cent in the next stage.

The Palestinians said Friday that the latest U.S. peace effort has failed. "Zero, there are no results,"

Palestinian Information Minister Yasser Abed Rabbo said of the Ross mission.

Mr. Ross was to hold final meetings Friday evening with Mr. Netanyahu and President Arafat before returning to the U.S.

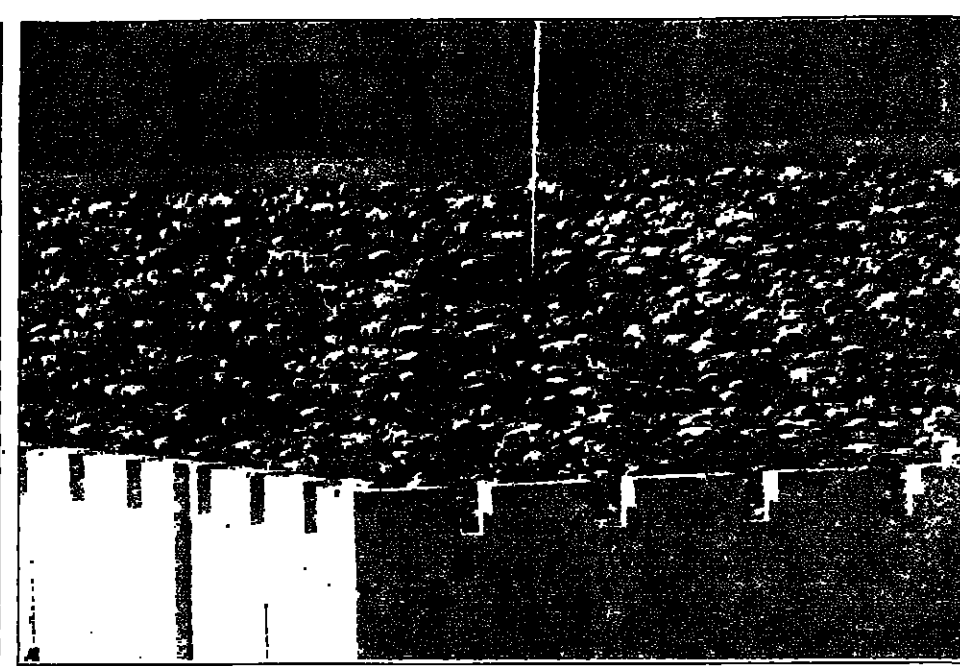
In one outcome of the Ross visit, Israel's armed forces chief of staff and a senior Palestinian security official toured the Palestinian airport in the Gaza Strip on Friday to try and resolve a longstanding dispute over security arrangements.

Mr. Abed Rabbo, meanwhile, responded angrily to Israel's tentative plans to build 30,000 more homes in Jewish settlements over the next two decades. The Haaretz daily said nearly half of the units have already been approved or are in the final stages of approval.

The housing ministry confirmed the plan, but said no approval had been given yet.

Benjamin Ben-Eliezer, who served as housing minister in the dovish Labour government, said such massive construction would wipe out any hope for peace.

"Whoever wants such a thing... destroys the peace process, destroys Yasser Arafat and destroys anyone who ever dreamed to reach a peace agreement," Mr. Ben-Eliezer told Israel army radio.



Hundreds of thousands of Palestinians pray between the Old City walls and Al Aqsa Mosque, Islam's third holiest shrine on the second Friday of the Holy Month of Ramadan (Reuters photo)

200,000 Palestinians attend prayers at Al Aqsa Mosque

OCCUPIED JERUSALEM (AFP) — More than 200,000 Palestinians attended weekly prayers at Jerusalem's Al Aqsa Mosque on Friday as Israeli police went on high alert after warnings of a suicide bombing.

But a police spokesman said the prayers went "very quietly," putting the number of worshippers at 200,000 on Al Aqsa Mosque compound in Jerusalem's Old City.

Al Aqsa officials put the number of worshippers at 250,000 as thousands of Palestinians flowed in from the West Bank after Israel lifted its ban on entry into Jerusalem for the prayers, the second Friday sermon of the Holy Month of Ramadan.

paramilitary border guards were deployed in and around Jerusalem to prevent "any trouble or a possible terrorist attack," said Jerusalem police chief Yair Yitzhaki.

Israel Radio reported that security forces had intelligence information indicating that Palestinian activists were plotting a suicide attack in Jerusalem.

It said Israel had passed its information on to the Palestinian security forces during a meeting late Thursday of Israeli and Palestinian negotiators and security officials mediated by U.S. special envoy Dennis Ross.

Israeli police officials said they also feared anti-Arab attacks by Jewish militants seeking to disrupt

the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations and prevent a promised Israeli troop withdrawal from more of the occupied West Bank.

Additional police and soldiers were deployed at checkpoints leading into Jerusalem as well as at the city's main market and pedestrian mall, both of which were hit by suicide bombings last summer which left 21 people dead.

Traditionally outdoor cafes, markets and other public places are crowded on Fridays as Israelis prepare for the weekly Sabbath, which begins at sundown.

The police spokesman said up to 300,000 Palestinians may attend next week's Friday prayers.

King meets Barak, Tichon over weekend; Mordechai expected in Jordan 'soon'

By Alia A. Tookan
Special to the Jordan Times

AMMAN — His Majesty King Hussein has held separate meetings with Israeli Knesset Speaker Dan Tichon and opposition Labour leader Ehud Barak over the weekend in Amman, officials said on Friday.

Jordanian officials, who declined comment on the talks, said both meetings were "private," and came in response to invitations from the King.

Meanwhile, an official source said on Friday that Israeli Defence Minister Yitzhak Mordechai was also expected to visit Jordan soon.

The King met with Mr. Barak on Wednesday evening and with Mr. Tichon and accompanying Arab Israeli Labour member of Knesset, Salah Tarif, the following night, the officials said.

Jordan's Lower House of Parliament Speaker, Sa'ed Hayel Srour, did not attend the meeting with Mr. Tichon, one of the officials told the Jordan Times.

Parliament, under public pressure not to normalise ties with the Jewish state after the signing of the 1994 peace treaty, has so far resisted any official meetings with Israeli lawmakers.

Two Jordanian deputies who visited Israel last month without asking permission

from parliament, returned home to a barrage of criticism from deputies, their constituencies, political parties and the media.

Both Mr. Hamadeh Fara'aneh and Mr. Mohammad Ra'afat, held talks with Mr. Tichon and other Israeli officials in Jerusalem.

The visits of Mr. Barak and Mr. Tichon came amidst increasing controversy over the extent of the next Israeli troop withdrawal from West Bank areas.

The resignation of Israel's foreign minister, David Levy, and his five-member Geshar party last week, in protest over budget allocations and the hard-line peace policies of the 19-month-old coalition government of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has raised Jordanian fears of a further delay to the peace process.

Mr. Levy has been calling for a redeployment of troops in accordance with signed accords to help revive talks on the Palestinian-Israeli peace track, at a standstill since Mr. Netanyahu took office in May 1996.

Jordanian-Israeli official ties have remained cool since the Mossad's assassination attempt against Hamas leader Khaled Mesha'al in Amman in late September.

Although King Hussein met with Israeli premier Benjamin Netanyahu in London in November, he has been unusually critical of the

Jewish state's policies with regards to the Palestinians.

The Monarch, who campaigned hard to convince sceptical Arab leaders to give Mr. Netanyahu a chance after his election, has squarely blamed the Israeli premier for the faltering peace process.

The Jerusalem Post reported on Thursday that Israeli Cabinet Secretary Dan Naveh and the prime minister's deputy military attaché, Shimon Shapira, held "secret" talks with Jordanian officials last Sunday.

Jordan has officially rejected past Israeli attempts to involve Amman in outlining Israel's security maps and in final status negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians.

But it is tightly watching Israeli-Palestinian developments and wants to ensure that any final status resolutions take into consideration Jordan's national and security interests.

Final status talks are set to tackle thorny issues such as water, Palestinian refugees, borders, Palestinian statehood, security arrangements and settlements.

Jordan, which ruled the West Bank and Arab east Jerusalem from 1950 until 1967, is home to over 1.2 million Palestinian refugees. The state-run media have not covered any of these Israeli-Jordanian meetings.

Pan-European conference to be held March 12 in London

BRUSSELS (AFP) — The European Union (EU) will hold a pan-European conference in London March 12 regardless of whether Turkey accepts an invitation to participate, EU officials said Friday.

EU leaders agreed at a Luxembourg summit last month to offer Turkey a place in the pan-European meeting involving would-be member states in an attempt to defuse its anger at being shut out of the EU's early enlargement plans.

But a day later Turkey said it had cut political dialogue with the EU and firmly rejected an offer to take part in the conference.

In addition to the leaders of the 15 EU member states, invitations to the conference will go out to the leaders of those countries applying for membership: 10 central and eastern European states plus Cyprus.

Although no agenda was stipulated, the conference, according to terms agreed in Luxembourg, will be "a multilateral forum for political consultation... to allow better

cooperation in foreign policy, security, justice and internal affairs."

It will also deal with economic and regional matters, and other areas of common interest.

EU sources said the summit had agreed to use "patience" to persuade Turkey to participate. In a visit to Ankara on Thursday, French Foreign Minister Hubert Vedrine stressed it was in Turkey's own interests to be at the conference, but his Turkish counterpart, Ismail Cem, said it was unlikely Turkey would attend.

Mr. Vedrine said the EU enlargement process would begin with a meeting of EU foreign ministers and those of the 11 applicant countries, to be held in Brussels on March 30. Actual negotiations for membership will begin sometime in April with a series of inter-governmental conferences between the EU and the six candidates considered in the first rank: Cyprus, Hungary, Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovenia and Estonia.

French FM says Turkey, EU cannot ignore each other

ATHENS (AFP) — French Foreign Minister Hubert Vedrine launched an effort Friday to mend fences between the European Union (EU) and Turkey, saying both sides could not ignore each other. "The general interest of the EU is to keep a common strategy regarding Turkey, just as it is in Turkey's interest to keep a strategy towards Europe," Mr. Vedrine told journalists in Athens after meeting his Greek counterpart, Theodore Pangalos. Athens' position, coupled with German pre-occupation with immigration from Turkey in the run-up to general elections there, is seen as contributing to the EU decision last month to sideline Turkey from upcoming talks on the bloc's expansion.

Tarawneh says participation in Reliant Mermaid as observer is not joining alliance with Israel

'We are still suffering from alliances we refused to join in 1990'

CAIRO (Petra) — Foreign Minister Faysel Tarawneh has dismissed any connection between the stalemate in the Middle East peace process and Jordan's participation in the Israeli-Turkish-U.S. manoeuvres as an observer, saying that the subject has taken a bigger size than it is worth.

In a statement to the Egyptian daily Al Ahran, published Friday, Dr. Tarawneh said Jordan's observer status participation is not and should not be viewed as a beginning of a

Jordanian-Israeli alliance.

"All know that Jordan does not join any alliances or agreements and will not engage in any military cooperation with any party," Dr. Tarawneh confirmed. He added that Jordan has signed a peace treaty with Israel, but it does not include any alliances. Moreover, he said, Jordan has announced once and again, that it will not join any non-Arab alliances because "we are still suffering from alliances that we refused to join in 1990." He said the concern from manoeuvres could be attributed to other reasons, but not to Jordan's observer status participation, which is not the most important event. Dr. Tarawneh called for not blowing this subject out of proportion.

Dr. Tarawneh said the timing of the manoeuvres was determined by Turkey and added that "if there is concern about the manoeuvres, then we are not participating in them. We have been invited to observe rescue exercises and not to attend manoeuvres in the military sense, we do not have a military fleet in order to participate," he said, adding that the door was open to all to monitor the situation and verify it.

Regarding normalisation of relations with the Jewish state, Dr. Tarawneh said this refers to countries which are not bound by peace treaties with Israel. Dr. Tarawneh said that Jordan is bound to cooperate with Israel in such areas as water. This entails that we build dams and joint projects to get our water rights from the Sea of Galilee. Regarding people, the treaties remove the legal barriers and the people have the right to establish or not to establish relations, Dr. Tarawneh said.

Britain raps Israeli settlement plans

LONDON (AFP) — Britain, which holds the European Union (EU) presidency, said Friday it was disturbed by reports of further Israeli settlement building in the West Bank, believing it damaging to the peace process.

"This development is particularly damaging at a time when the U.S., the EU and the international community are intensifying their efforts to achieve a break-

through in the peace process," Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs Derek Fatchett said.

"Settlements are both illegal under international law and damaging to the peace process. Both sides must avoid counter-productive unilateral actions of this kind," he said.

Mr. Fatchett said this was one of the issues he would be raising with the Israeli government when visiting

the country next week as an EU representative.

Israel plans to almost double the number of units for Jewish settlers in the West Bank over the next few years, the Israeli newspaper Haaretz revealed Friday.

It said the housing ministry had plans for a further 30,000 units, 14,000 of which have already received planning permission.

Five wounded by bomb attacks in south Lebanon

MARJAYOUN (AP) — Guerrillas detonated two roadside bombs in southern Lebanon Thursday, wounding four Israelis and a pro-Israeli militiaman, Lebanese and Israeli security officials said.

A remote-controlled bomb exploded as an Israeli convoy went down the Ain Abel-Bint Jbeil road in the Israeli-occupied zone at 2.15 p.m., Lebanese security officials said.

Lebanese officials said the explosion wounded four Israeli soldiers and two militiamen of the Israeli-

backed South Lebanon Army (SLA).

But in Tel Aviv an Israeli army spokesman said the fourth casualty was an Israeli television cameraman. He denied any SLA casualties.

The cameraman, Shlomi Afriat, 33, continued to film for several minutes after he was wounded by the bomb that detonated under his vehicle, the army spokesman said.

The four wounded Israelis were airlifted to Israel for treatment. Earlier Thursday, another

roadside bomb wounded one militiaman near the Beit Yahoun crossing, about 25 kilometres south of Marjayoun, the largest town in the Israeli-occupied zone. Lebanese officials said.

Israeli military sources confirmed that an SLA man was lightly wounded in the first explosion.

Hizbollah claimed responsibility for both attacks.

Elsewhere in the south, a 50-year-old Lebanese woman, Latifeh Qubaissi, was injured by Israeli

shelling on the village of Qlayeh, about 16 kilometres north of the Israeli border. Lebanese officials said.

Hizbollah, or the Party of God, has used roadside bombs and rocket attacks to dislodge the Israelis and its allied South Lebanon Army militia from the occupied zone.

Israel maintains the zone with 1,500 soldiers and the 2,500-member SLA. It set up the enclave in 1985 with the claimed purpose to protect its northern towns from cross-border guerrilla attacks.



ALGERIAN WOMAN ESCAPES MASSACRE: Algerian woman explains Wednesday how she escaped from a mass killing in the western province of Relizane. Halima ran for three hours before taking cover in a place where she was out of danger. A total of sixty-two people died in the two nights of killings, between Monday and Wednesday this week, in three separate villages. According to Algerian security forces the killings in three mountainous villages were carried out by 'terrorists', Algeria's term for Islamist guerrillas. The killings here have brought growing foreign pressure for an international inquiry into the killings (Reuters photo)

3 Kurd prisoners hospitalised in Turkey

ANKARA (AFP) — Three Kurdish prisoners hunger-striking for 50 days in an eastern Turkish jail were hospitalised by authorities Friday after their condition became critical, the Anatolia news agency said.

The three were near death when the director of the Erzurum prison ordered medical intervention, it said. Their condition reportedly improved after they were hospitalised.

Dozens of political prisoners at the Erzurum prison, located some 1,000 kilometres east of Istanbul, have been on hunger strike since mid-November to protest against poor prison conditions.

Most of them are convicted members of the outlawed Kurdish Labour Party (PKK), which has been waging a separatist war in southeast Turkey since 1984. At least 28,000 people have been killed in the armed conflict.

The rest of the hunger strikers are members of left-wing organisations.

Akin Birdal, head of Turkey's Human Rights Association, warned Wednesday that at least six of the hunger strikers were in critical condition. He asked Justice Minister Oltan Sungurlu to find a way to satisfy the strikers and end the strike.

Twelve leftists died in July 1996 after fasting for more than 60 days in several Turkish prisons.

Lawyers representing the hunger strikers had met with justice ministry officials on several occasions, but without reaching any agreement on the 30-odd demands made by the prisoners.

Delegation of Arab Americans holds talks with Assad on peace process

DAMASCUS (AP) — A delegation of leading Arab Americans held talks with Syrian President Hafez Assad Thursday on the Mideast peace process and Syrian-U.S. relations.

One of three congressmen in the delegation, Rep. Nick Rahall of West Virginia, told reporters that their discussions with the Syrian government would "show Americans that Syria is serious about peace and that it is ready to embark once again upon the peace process, resuming negotiations where they broke off two years ago."

Syria has long complained that Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who took office in June 1996, has retreated from the previous government's reported

agreement to return the Golan Heights. Mr. Netanyahu says the Heights, a strategic plateau which Israel occupied in the 1967 Arab-Israeli war, are crucial to Israel's security.

The 18-strong delegation arrived in Syria Wednesday from Lebanon. Early Thursday the Arab Americans held talks with Syrian Foreign Minister Farouk Sharaa.

A presidential spokesman said the visitors talk with Mr. Assad concentrated on the stalled Middle East peace process.

Mr. Rahall said that in their talks with Mr. Sharaa, "we brought up concerns we had in America and he responded in a very efficient manner."

The U.S. has accused Syria of sponsoring inter-

national terrorism, a charge that Damascus denies.

James Zogby, the head of the Washington-based Arab American Institute, said the delegation was considering alternatives to the U.N. sanctions imposed on Iraq after its 1990 invasion of Kuwait, which have caused widespread malnutrition among Iraqis.

"I think the American people feel very deeply about how much suffering the Iraqi people have endured," Dr. Zogby said. "We know that the people of Iraq are the victims of the regime."

"We are looking for an alternative to the economic sanctions, but an alternative that would not reward or strengthen the regime," he said, referring to the government of President Saddam Hussein.

Turkey names new envoy to Tehran, ending 11-month diplomatic rift

ANKARA (AFP) — Turkey has named Sencer Ozsoy as its new ambassador to Iran, ending an 11-month diplomatic rift between the two countries, according to a decree published here Friday.

Tehran declared Turkey's Ambassador Osman Koruturk and the consul general at Orumiyeh, Ufuk Ozsancak, undesirable in February

after Ankara expelled Ambassador Mohammad Reza Bagheri and three other Iranian diplomats in a row over alleged Iranian interference in its domestic affairs.

Mr. Bagheri had told a gathering organised by the mayor of an Ankara suburb of Ankara that "victory will come to Islam across the world."

Supporters of Sharia (Islamic) law "should not be afraid of being called fundamentalists by the others," he added, saying: "They are the most rational of the faithful."

Secularism is one of the key tenets of the modern Turkish state and the comments by the ambassador, on top of a series of pro-Islamic remarks by members of the then ruling opposition Welfare Party,

kicked up a storm of protest from secular groups.

In the wake of the row, Turkey's mission in Iran was downgraded and taken over by a charge d'affaires.

But at a summit meeting of Islamic countries last month, Turkey and Iran decided to reappoint ambassadors to each other's capitals.

7 candidates enter fray for Cyprus presidential election

NICOSIA (AFP) — Cypriot President Glafcos Clerides and six challengers entered the race Friday for next month's presidential election, with the stalemate over the 24-year division of Cyprus set to dominate campaigning.

The poll is likely to be a three-way challenge between the 78-year-old incumbent, former foreign minister and independent George Iacovou, 59, and George Vassiliou, 66, whom Mr. Clerides narrowly beat in 1993.

Mr. Clerides, a veteran politician who is seeking a second five-year term, says he feels "duty bound" to complete the work he had begun on a settlement for this divided Mediterranean island and on its accession to the European Union (EU).

But the virtual collapse of U.N.-sponsored talks between President Clerides

and Turkish-Cypriot leader Rauf Denkash last year has dented the president's credibility.

The centre-right Diko Party, which helped Mr. Clerides to victory in the last election five years ago, has thrown its weight behind Mr. Iacovou who also has the backing of Cyprus's second largest party, the communist Akel Party.

Political observers say that with the support of two of the island's main parties Mr. Iacovou is now the clear favourite in the Feb. 8 poll.

Mr. Vassiliou was elected in 1988 with the backing of Akel and he only lost to Mr. Clerides in 1993 by a margin of less than 2,000 votes. But Akel's decision to back Mr. Iacovou, who served as his foreign minister, has hit President Clerides' hopes.

Cyprus has been divided by a U.N.-patrolled buffer zone since Turkey seized the

northern third in 1974 after a right-wing coup in Nicosia aimed at uniting the island with Greece.

President Clerides and Mr. Denkash held a series of meetings last year in a major push by the U.N. to break the status quo on the island, but Mr. Denkash pulled out of the negotiations after the EU announced plans to hold accession talks with the Greek-Cypriot government.

However, President Clerides still insists that 1998 will be the key year for forging a solution on the Cyprus problem, and in a New Year televised address he warned the people of the island they would "pay dearly for any mistake."

The coming year would be "the most crucial in the island's history," he said as it "should pave the way for a settlement of the problem" of the island, as well as "Cypriot membership of the

European Union."

Presenting his candidacy on Friday, Mr. Iacovou promised to "fight to secure the rights of Cyprus and her people." He added that he wanted to strengthen the country's defence pact with Greece.

While President Clerides insists he has created the climate for serious talks about the island's future to begin immediately after the elections, Mr. Iacovou has accused the president of mishandling the issue of the division and of making no concrete progress.

Around 400,000 people will go to the polls, and for the first time people over the age of 18 will be able to cast their ballots. The previous limit was 21. Voting is compulsory.

Other challengers this time round are Vasos Lyssandros, 77, of the socialist EDEK party, Nicos Rolandis, 63, of

the Liberals, Nicos Koutous, 53, of New Horizons, and Alexis Galanos, 57, a member of the centre-right Diko Party who is running as an independent.

As well as the Cyprus problem, the issue of the island's sluggish economy — in particular the fall in the number of foreign visitors that has hit the vital tourism sector — is also expected to top the agenda.

The U.N.-sponsored talks between the Greek and Turkish-Cypriot communities have been put on hold until the results of the vote are known.

If no candidate wins more than 50 per cent of the votes cast on Feb. 8, a second round run-off between the two best-placed candidates will be held one week later.

Voting will take place at over 1,000 polling stations at a cost of nearly \$4 million.

Clerides insists missiles must be deployed

NICOSIA (AFP) — Cypriot President Glafcos Clerides insisted that controversial air defence missiles must be deployed despite Turkish anger to protect the island from air attacks, the official CNA news agency said Friday.

President Clerides said the Russian-made S-300 ground-to-air missiles would help provide "persuasive air coverage against enemy jets" and were part of the country's strategic defence plan.

"The S-300 missiles will cause such damage to the enemy's air force that they will think twice before attacking again," said Mr. Clerides in an interview with state television late Thursday, according to CNA.

"If we don't implement it [the strategic plan], then the

only use for our tanks is to show them off at parades knowing that if we go to battle they will be destroyed," he added.

Mr. Clerides, who on Friday formally announced that he would be running for a second term in the Feb. 8 presidential election, also said an air force base near Paphos would be up and running later this month.

The Cypriot government's decision in January last year to go ahead with the purchase of the missiles sparked an angry response from Ankara, which says the weapons are capable of hitting targets in southern Turkey.

Turkey has warned it will use force to prevent the delivery of the missiles scheduled this spring.

JORDAN TELEVISION

Tel. 773111-19

PROGRAMME TWO

14:10Twinkle
14:30French Programmes
16:15Prayers
16:30Believe and Behave
17:00NBA
18:00Neighbours
18:30News Headlines
18:35You Bet Your Life
19:00Le Journal
19:15Ramadan Talks
19:35Perspective
20:00Cinema Cinema
20:30Prism
21:10Time Trax
22:00News in English
22:30 Feature film: "How to Murder a Millionaire"
23:59Country Music

PRAYER TIMES

05:11Fajr
06:32(Sunrise) Duha
11:43Dhuhr
14:30Asr
16:54Maghreb
18:15Isha

CHURCHES

St. Mary of Nazareth Church
Sweifeh, Tel. 810740
Assemblies of God Church Tel.
632785.
St. Joseph Church Tel. 624590
Church of the Annunciation

JORDAN TIMES DAILY GUIDE AND CALENDAR

Tel. 637440.

De la Salle Church Tel. 661656.
Terra Sancta Church Tel.
622366

Church of the Annunciation
Tel. 623541

Anglican Church Tel. 652826.
Armenian Catholic Church
Tel. 771331.

Armenian Orthodox Church
Tel. 775261.

St. Ephraim Church Tel.
771751.

Armenian International Church
Tel. 865897

Evangelical Lutheran Church
Tel. 824328.

German-speaking Evangelical
Congregation Tel. 845457

The Latter-Day Saints Tel.
654932.

Church of Nazareth Tel.
675691.

The Evangelical Local Church
in Amman Tel. 811295

English-speaking
Latin Catholics Parish Tel.
614190.

WEATHER

Bulletin supplied by the Department of Meteorology

Relative cold weather conditions will prevail with skies

cloudy to partly cloudy. Rain-

fall is expected in the northern part of the Kingdom extending over all areas in the evening

and winds northwesterly moderate to active. In Aqaba, it will be sunny to partly cloudy,

winds northerly moderate, and seas calm.

Min./Max. temp.

Ammanzero/10

Aqaba08/18

Deserts-1/17

Jordan Valley07/17

Yesterday's high temperatures:

Amman 11 Aqaba 21 Humidity readings: Amman 34 per cent.

Aqaba 34 per cent.

USEFUL TELEPHONE NUMBERS

NIGHT DUTY

AMMAN:

Dr. Mukhlis Alalash5519220

Dr. Rami Sakar856457

Dr. Youssef Al Fagih790104

Dr. Fadil Al Khatib865456

Firas pharmacy661912

Ferdows pharmacy778336

Al Asema pharmacy637055

Nairoukh pharmacy623672

Al Salam pharmacy636730

Yacoub pharmacy644945

Shmeisani pharmacy637660

Najib pharmacy847632

IRBID:

Dr. Fawzi Abul Hajja252790

Al Quds pharmacy(-)

ZARQA:

Dr. Fahd Jabir984549

Khalifeh pharmacy985417

Overseas Calls010230

Central Amman Telephone

Repairs623101

Abdali Telephone Repairs

.....661101

Jordan Television773111

Radio Jordan774111

Water Authority680100

Jordan Electricity Authority

.....815615

Electric Power Company

.....636381

RJ Flight Information 08-

53200

Queen Alia Intl. Airport 08-

53200

EMERGENCIES

Food Control Centre637111

Civil Defence Department

.....661111

Civil Defence Immediate Rescue

.....630341

Civil Defence Emergency199

Rescue Police 192, 621111.

637777

Fire Brigade617101

Blood Bank775121

Highway Police843402

Traffic Police896390

Public Security Department

.....630321

Hotel Complaints605800

Price Complaints661176

Water and Sewerage Complaints

.....897467

Amman Municipality Complaints

.....787111

Telephone Information (directory assistance) 121

AMMAN:

Hussein Medical Centre

.....813813/32

Khalidi Maternity, J. Amn

.....644281/6

Akileh Maternity, J. Amn

.....64241/2

Jabal Amman Maternity

.....642362

Malhas, J. Amman636140

Palestine, Shmeisani07071

Shmeisani Hospital669131

University Hospital845845

Al-Muasher Hospital667227/9

The Islamic, Abdali 666126/37

Al-Ahli, Abdali664164/6

Italian, Al-Muhajreen

.....664164/6

ARRIVALS

Royal Jordanian (RJ) Flights

09:30New Delhi (RJ)

09:55Karachi, Dubai (RJ)

10:05Beirut (RJ)

10:15Damascus, Bahrain (RJ)

11:15Colombo (RJ)

15:00New York, Amsterdam (RJ)

16:20Cairo (RJ)

16:30Jeddah (add) (RJ)

17:00London, Frankfurt (RJ)

18:20Casablanca (add) (RJ)

02:30Abu Dhabi (RJ)

05:15Bangkok (RJ)

Other Flights

09:30Al 'Arish (PF)

13:15Riyadh (SV)

15:05Vienna (OS)

18:00Dubai, Damascus (EK)

NEWS IN BRIEF

King, Crown Prince join worshippers at Al Hussein Mosque

AMMAN (Petra) — His Majesty King Hussein and His Royal Highness Crown Prince Hassan joined worshippers in performing Friday prayers at the Al Hussein mosque in downtown Amman. King Hussein and the worshippers listened to the Friday sermon, which focused on the values of fasting and the need for solidarity.

Princess Basma tours Madaba district

MADABA (Petra) — HRH Princess Basma Thursday toured the Madaba district, where she visited Thiban Health Centre and donated a complete set of dental equipment. While in Madaba, Princess Basma opened a school for the deaf, established by Al Aqsa Charitable Society, and donated hearing aids to 30 children enrolled at the school. Princess Basma performed Al Maghreb prayer at Al Hamd mosque and had iftar with a number of needy families in the Koran teaching centre at the mosque.

Security personnel leave to join U.N. force in Angola

AMMAN (Petra) — A new group of Jordanian security personnel Thursday left for Angola to join the UN peace-keeping forces in the war-torn African country. Bidding farewell to the Jordanian police force members, the assistant Public Security Department director general for operations and planning, Maj. Gen. Mohammad Anwar Bsoul, called on the departing police force to set an example in their performance, to maintain neutrality, and to be the best representatives of Jordan in Angola.



MAJALI MEETS WITH UNICEF REGIONAL DIRECTOR: Prime Minister Abdul Salam Majali receives the regional director of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) Regional Office for the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), Ibrahim Fall, and reviews means of further developing bilateral relations between Jordan and UNICEF. Mr. Fall assumed his new duties as regional director of the Amman-based MENA Regional Office on Dec. 16. Mr. Fall was received by HRH Crown Prince Hassan on Dec. 27 and by Foreign Minister Fayez Tarawneh last week. (Petra photo)

Writers union elects new president, administrative board

By Tareq Ayyoub
Special to the Jordan Times

AMMAN — The Jordan Writers Intellectual Union (JWIU) has elected a new president and eight other members to the administrative committee to run the affairs of the union for the coming two years, a JWIU spokesperson said Friday.

Ranad Khatib, who was elected JWIU vice president, said Hani Khatib was elected Thursday by acclamation to replace Hani Annad as the union's president.

Ms. Khatib told the Jordan Times that six candidates were running for president, but five withdrew their nomination in favour of Dr. Khatib.

She said 29 were nominated for the eight posts in the administrative committee, but seven pulled out of the

contest on election day.

The JWIU was established in 1986 following the dissolution of the Jordan Writers Association (JWA) by the Military Court at that time.

One year later, the JWA was revived but the two entities failed to reunite.

Members of the two groups have accused each other of being responsible for the split in writers' ranks.

"What we are eager to achieve is the reunification of the two entities," said Ms. Khatib, "but unfortunately some elements want to place stones in our path." She did not elaborate.

Ms. Khatib said attempts were made through the Ministry of Culture to reunite the two groups, "but all attempts failed to bear fruit."

She stated that the association was against any cultural normalisation with "the Israeli enemy."

The normalisation of cultural ties with Israel is widely rejected by many Jordanian writers and intellectuals.

Ms. Khatib said the JWIU's new leadership will work to enhance the union's role in the cultural life of the country. She added that among the tasks is enhancing cultural relationships with their counterparts in the Arab World.

Those who were elected to the union's administrative committee are: Ranad Khatib, Faisal Rafo'u, Khalid Obaidat, Akram Abul Raghib, Mahmoud Sarhan, Nadi Aloul, Mustafa Khreisat, and Ahmad Jabr.

Of the JWIU's 206 members, 20 per cent are women. Membership in the union requires that the candidate have written two books or have two manuscripts under work.

Interior ministry announces foreign HIV-carrier will not be deported

By Rana Hussein
Jordan Times Staff Reporter

AMMAN — The Ministry of Interior will not deport an Arab student who carries the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) virus despite threats by a lawyer to sue the government, Minister of Interior Nathir Rashid said Friday.

"It is strictly a human case," Mr. Rashid told the Jordan Times. "The student is not posing any threat. He was infected with the AIDS virus when he was seven years old through a blood transfusion."

"I personally granted him permission to stay in the country after consulting with the health minister [Ashraf Kurd], who

assured me that the student would not pose any health threat," Mr. Rashid said.

Current government regulations stipulate that non-Jordanians with HIV/AIDS must be deported. Jordanians infected with the virus receive education and counselling.

Commenting on reports in local newspapers that the student was planning to leave the country Friday, Mr. Rashid said he had no knowledge on this matter.

"We granted him permission to stay in the country, but if he decided to leave, it is up to him," the minister said.

However, Attorney Faisal Batayneh, who last

week announced that he is suing both the interior and health ministers on the grounds that their decision threatens public health, stated that the student was staying in the country.

"These are false reports. The student is still in the country and is trying to enroll in another private university since he was expelled from his current university," Mr. Batayneh told the Jordan Times Friday.

The case was brought up when the weekly tabloid Shihan reported in its Jan. 3 issue that an unidentified student enrolled at a private university was granted residency by the Ministry of Interior.

The article prompted Mr. Batayneh to file a complaint at the Lower House of Parliament to sue both ministers for breaking residence laws by allowing the student to reside in the Kingdom.

Recent reports released by the Ministry of Health and Medical Care indicate that over 80 per cent of the HIV/AIDS carriers in Jordan were infected outside the country, while nearly 40 per cent of the HIV/AIDS carriers are non-Jordanians.

The reports also stated that contaminated blood or blood products were the leading cause of HIV/AIDS cases recorded in Jordan, followed by heterosexual contact with an infected partner.

Lower House to begin debate Sunday on revised JD1.95 billion state budget

AMMAN (J.T.) — The Lower House of Parliament tomorrow will start debating the state's JD1.95 billion draft budget for 1998, a process that deputies believe will be completed before the end of this month.

The debate follows the revision of the budget draft by the House's finance and economic affairs committee, chaired by Ali Abul Rugheib.

Mr. Ragheib has already submitted the committee's recommendations to the House on the following issues: economic and social reforms, Jordan's debt, the balance of payments of public expenditure, the Kingdom's monetary policies, agriculture and agricultural land, water, energy, health, youth, civil defence, the private sector, the Aqaba Region Authority, the Social Security Corporation, labour, and the min-

istries of industry and trade and supply.

The committee recommended that the government pursue monetary policies that would safeguard the present exchange rates of the Jordanian dinar and consider the purchasing power of the local currency as the criterion for gauging price increases.

The committee recommended that the government expand the social safety net, involve more manpower in the production process, direct borrowed money towards development projects, and minimise borrowing as much as possible.

It called on the government to tighten control over financial matters, introduce more effective measures to collect funds payable to the treasury, facilitate procedures for investors, recon-

struct the public sector, remove customs tariffs on imports, consider basic components for national industrial production, set out a clear national privatisation policy, reduce the sales tax and customs duties, and enable the National Aid Fund to accommodate more needy people.

The committee highlighted the importance of reducing charges on water used for agricultural purposes, speeding up the construction of the Al Adasiyeh Dam, drawing up a national plan for marketing Jordan's skilled manpower abroad, intensifying efforts to ensure the entry of Jordan's products into Palestinian markets, increasing economic collaboration with the Palestinian National Authority, imposing stricter control to prevent merchants from

tampering with prices, and retaining the cash subsidy policy to help needy groups.

It urged the government to draw up a strategy for improving educational services in less developed areas of Jordan, steer education towards meeting the demands of the local labour market, reconsider the present tariffs for telephone calls, encourage the private sector to become more involved in investment projects, link the Social Security Corporation's pension scale with the market's price index, and provide all possible support to the armed forces, the security services, and the retired servicemen.

The committee requested that the government heed and consider these recommendations once they have been endorsed by the House.

Jordanian industries converting to more ozone-friendly substances

By Lola M. Keilani
Special to the Jordan Times

AMMAN — Jordan's industrial sector is converting its technological appliances to make factories ozone-friendly by the year 1999 after the Kingdom joined a world pact for environment protection.

Jordan's Environment Protection Corporation (EPC) has begun taking drastic measures after the Kingdom signed the Montreal Protocol for the Protection of the Ozone Layer in 1997, officials said.

The deal commits all 140 signatories to freeze the production, use, and export of chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs) and to limit the use of methyl bromide, both ozone-unfriendly substances. It also urges them to end all trade of these materials by next year to protect the ozone layer.

"Jordan will freeze the consumption of CFCs, which are hazardous substances that contribute to the

destruction of the ozone layer," said Hussein Shahin, assistant director of the Ozone Project at the EPC.

"Protection will be ensured by changing the manufacturing process in certain industries producing refrigerators, sponge material, and aerosol cans," he told the Jordan Times in a recent interview. "So far, 18 industrial complexes have adopted the new technology and 15 other factories will follow suit by May of this year."

Mr. Hussein said the EPC has already succeeded in reaching the 1999 target of reducing methyl bromide consumption in Jordan from 14,000 tonnes to 8,000 — a major achievement compared to other developing countries.

According to the Montreal protocol, all signatories are required to limit the use of methyl bromide under a gradual time frame. Developing countries, including Jordan, should stop producing the substance by the year 2002 and terminate its use by 2015.

In the year 2003, participants will meet to re-evaluate the implementation of the timetable and devise a new strategy for the coming years, including proper agendas and schedules to specify the gradual decrease in using environmentally unfriendly materials.

Jordanian factories polluting the ozone layer have been encouraged to use new technology through grants from the Montreal Multilateral Fund. The fund has allocated \$25 million for 1998 and 1999 in order to change activities that use methyl bromide in developing countries.

"Jordanian factories welcome the new technology because they can upgrade their machinery, some of which are 20 years old," said Mr. Hussein.

Other nations were also facing international pressure because they had to upgrade machinery to use environmentally friendly imported raw materials.

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Opposition groups to examine 'practical measures' to protest role in naval exercises

By Tareq Ayyoub
Special to the Jordan Times

AMMAN — Opposition parties and groups will hold a meeting Monday to discuss practical measures to protest the government's decision to attend the recently concluded Turkish-Israeli-American naval exercises, a spokesperson for the parties said Friday.

Fou'ad Dabour, secretary general of the Arab Ba'ath Progressive Party, said the meeting is a follow-up to a "popular meeting" held Thursday evening, which was attended by tens of opposition party leaders, professional union representatives, and independent personalities.

Mr. Dabour told the Jordan Times that the Monday meeting will discuss "practical measures that can be implemented by the parties to protest the government's decision."

The meeting Thursday focused on the Kingdom's decision to send an observer to attend the five-day sea

exercises by Israeli, Turkish, and American navies in the eastern Mediterranean.

The exercises, which were concluded Friday, prompted a chorus of criticism from Syria, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, and the Cairo-based Arab League, which urged Arab states to boycott these exercises.

Israel and Turkey said the games, codenamed Reliant Mermaid, posed no threat to any regional party, adding that the exercises would focus on search and rescue operations.

Jordan turned down requests by Arab countries and dispatched naval commander Brigadier General Hussein Khasawneh as an observer to the games.

During the meeting Thursday, participants lashed at the Turkish regime and accused it of being "anti-Arab and anti-Islam."

Participants proposed holding a sit-in near the Turkish embassy in Amman to protest Ankara's "military cooperation with Israel."

Among other proposals

submitted was holding a "national conference" that would include the leaders of all political parties and unions, as well as national personalities, to counter any decision by Jordan "to participate in such exercises in the future."

The head of the Jordan Engineers Association, Leith Shbeilat, said the government's decision to attend the manoeuvres was part of a "campaign to bring Jordan closer to an alliance grouping Israel and Turkey."

Mr. Shbeilat, who was reading a statement on behalf of the professional unions, charged that the Kingdom's move was part of a wider plan to strengthen "military and security cooperation with the Zionist enemy, the U.S., and Britain."

"We denounce this step and urge the government to refrain from such policies and to apologise to the Jordanian people," he added.

Mr. Shbeilat's proposal that the participants take immediate "practical measures" to

protest the government's decision was rejected by Islamic Action Front (IAF) Secretary General Abdul Latif Arabiyat.

Dr. Arabiyat urged the gathering not to take "hasty decisions" and proposed forming a committee that would discuss all the proposals that were submitted during the three-hour meeting.

Jordan Dentists Association Chairperson Sa'id Abu Maizar proposed holding a "national conference" to pressure the government to refrain from entering into any "alliance" with Israel and Turkey.

Hamad Farhan, an independent, veteran pan-Arab politician, charged that the Kingdom's participation in the manoeuvres was a threat to the "security and stability of the Arab Nation."

The participants agreed to form a committee to discuss all proposals by the participants to enact a "practical plan" to protest the government's participation in the manoeuvres.

WHAT'S GOING ON

CONCERT

* Musical performance by Linefield Wind Symphony and the band of the National Music Conservatory at Philadelphia Hotel at 8:00 p.m.

SECOND PLASTIC ART WEEK

* Abstract (plastic) art by several artists at the Royal Cultural Centre, until Jan. 17.

* Film on renowned Italian artist Leonardo da Vinci at the Royal Cultural Centre at 7:30 p.m.

EXHIBITIONS

* Exhibition of writing arabesque, miniature on silk by Hatouf Hijazi Tabba'a, at the Jordan Arts and Crafts Centre, Jabal Amman, 2nd Circle (Tel. 647858) until Jan. 15.

* Works by about a hundred artists from Iraq, Syria, Sudan, Lebanon and Jordan at Hamourabi Art Gallery, Gardens Street, until Feb. 20 (Tel. 5536098).

* Works by contemporary Arab artists at Darar Al Funun, Jabal Weibdeh.

Water authority inviting bids for management contract

AMMAN (Petra) — Minister of Water and Irrigation Munther Haddadin has announced that the Water Authority of Jordan (WAJ) is distributing tenders inviting bids from companies wishing to conclude a "management contract" for managing the water and sewage networks within the Amman governorate.

Five international companies have already been qualified to take part in the bidding, he said, adding that the management contract is a major step in improving Amman's water and sewage services.

In an announcement last week, Dr. Haddadin said the

Price increases will affect less than 40% of Amman — water authority

AMMAN (J.T.) — Less than 40 per cent of Amman residents will be affected by the recent increase in water consumption charges because they consume 41 cubic metres of water or less every three months, according to Munther Khleifat, secretary general of the Jordan Water Authority (JWA).

In an interview with Al Ra'i Arabic daily, he said the JWA, which increased the price of water on Oct. 1, 1997, will distribute October, November, and December bills to consumers within the next two weeks.

Only ten per cent of the capital's residents will pay a slight increase in price, while 27 per cent of Amman residents will shoulder the brunt because it is they who consume large amounts of water, according to Mr. Khleifat.

People in the other governorates who consume 52 cubic metres of water or less in three months, nearly 76 per cent of the population, will not be affected by the hike, and only 7.5 per cent of people living in these governorates will be slightly affected, he added.

Mr. Khleifat said the JWA introduced the new

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Mowlam submits 14-point paper to loyalist prisoners

BELFAST (AFP) — Britain's Northern Ireland Secretary Mo Mowlam emerged from a 90-minute meeting with Protestant loyalist prisoners at the Maze here Friday calling it "useful and constructive."

She told a news conference she had presented a 14-point paper to the loyalists aimed at keeping their political representatives in the multi-party talks on the province's future.

It contained an assurance that Northern Ireland would remain part of the United Kingdom so long as the majority of people living in the province wishes it.

Militants of the Ulster Defence Association and Ulster Freedom Fighters, who have called on their

political leaders to withdraw from the peace negotiations due to resume in Belfast Monday, will decide whether to stick with the process later in the day.

She hoped for an early decision on the issue.

Ms. Mowlam said she told the jailed loyalists that the only way to an Ulster settlement was through negotiation.

"I came here to ensure that this process is taken forward by all possible means."

Ms. Mowlam said she also saw prisoners from the loyalist Ulster Volunteer Force and the Irish Republican Army who told her to "keep going."

Ms. Mowlam said her debate with the loyalists

had been informal, but she stressed nothing could be achieved unless there was talks process, and she hoped all sides would be back at the Stormont negotiating table when dialogue begins again Monday.

"No one is going to get anything if we don't have a talks process," she said. "Talks are the only way forward."

But she added: "If we get confidence in the talks process... then the issues can begin to be addressed."

"They understand, like most people in Northern Ireland, that it's very difficult to do anything in terms of confidence-building unless we can get an accommodation," said Ms. Mowlam.

"We had some very

detailed discussions but we agreed we would not go into the detail of them. There is no doubt they are interested in progress at the talks and that's paramount to them."

Ms. Mowlam added: "I came here determined to make my message clear. Talking is the only way forward. We have had frustratingly slow progress but there is a desire to move forward."

"The prisoners felt the talks were going nowhere but I have done my best. The talks are the only way forward and unless they participate in that, nothing but negative events can happen in Northern Ireland."

"I don't know if I succeeded. We will find out later today."

New Spanish ruling party politician killed in Basque car blast

ZARAUZ, Spain (AP) — A councillor from Spain's ruling party died Friday from his injuries when a bomb exploded beneath his car in what appeared to be the first attack of the year by the armed Basque separatist group ETA.

Jose Ignacio Iruetagoiena, 34, died shortly after the blast occurred around 8 a.m. (0700 GMT), losing an arm and a leg in the blast, the Interior

Ministry said.

The bomb exploded moments after Mr. Iruetagoiena left his home to drive to work in Zarauz, where he is a local Popular Party councillor. He was survived by his wife and two children, national radio said.

If the ETA claims responsibility, Mr. Iruetagoiena would be the fourth Popular Party politician to be killed by the group in two years.

The attacks came a day after the party's chief representative in the Basque region called for greater police protection for the party's members.

"Once again it has been verified that we are a clear target," Carlos Irujaiz said shortly after the attack.

On Dec. 11, Popular Party Councillor Jose Luis Caso was shot while dining in a bar in the Basque city of

Irun.

That attack came three months after the ETA kidnapped and killed Miguel Angel Blanco, a youthful small-town councillor whose slaying drew millions of Spaniards onto the streets for several days of protests.

ETA, which stands for Basque homeland and freedom, has killed nearly 800 people since it began fighting for Basque independence in 1968.

Kohl rules out post-election alliance with left-wing opposition party

WINDHAGEN (AFP) — German Chancellor Helmut Kohl Friday ruled out any alliance between his conservative Christian Democratic Union (CDU) party and the opposition Social Democrats (SPD) after general elections due in September.

He would not enter such a "grand coalition" if the elections proved inconclusive for the ruling centre-right parties, he said.

"We don't want a new (grand) coalition," said Mr. Kohl. "We want to continue the current coalition," he told reporters at the beginning of a two-day strategy session of his CDU party at Windhagen, 30 kilometres south of Bonn.

The CDU rules along with its sister Christian Social Union (CSU) and the liberal Free Democrats (FDP).

The CDU/CSU and the SPD formed a grand coalition between 1966 and 1969.

That year Willy Brandt became then West Germany's first Social Democratic chancellor of a coalition which comprised the FDP.

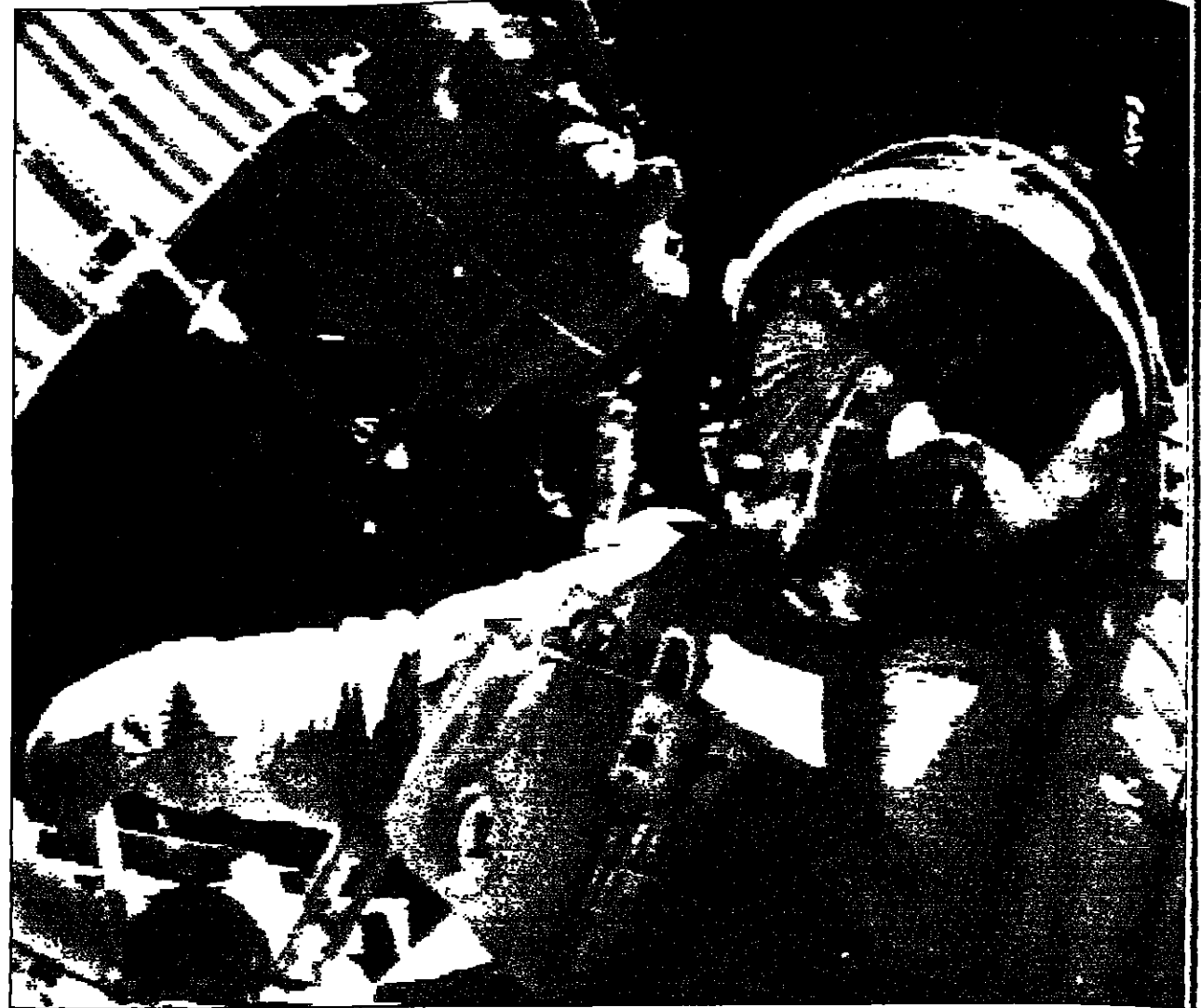
'Global Hilton' balloon leaking, tries to land

WASHINGTON (AFP) — The "Global Hilton" hot air balloon that left Albuquerque, New Mexico, early Friday in a bid to make the first round-the-world non-stop balloon flight was trying to land after a technical problem, the ground crew said.

A helium cell in the upper part of the balloon, piloted by U.S. adventurers Dick Rutan and David Melton, ruptured at an altitude of about 9,000 metres about an hour after liftoff, the ground crew said.

"The helium cell burst at 7:28 a.m. our time," said Patrick Barry, a ground crew member. "We are trying to land it."

The balloon, launched at 6:19 a.m. (1319 GMT), was leaking fuel but was not in immediate danger of crashing, the ground crew said.



Russian flight engineer Pavel Vinogradov during his spacewalk which included inspection of a leak in one of the space stations external hatches. Vinogradov and Commander Anatoly Solovyov completed all their tasks during a record-breaking spacewalk outside the Mir space station Friday after a spacewalk which lasted only three hours instead of the six originally planned (Reuters photo)

Mir crew locates faulty lock on leaky hatch

MOSCOW (AP) — Two Russian cosmonauts ventured into open space for more than three hours Friday and successfully located a defective lock that was allowing air to leak out of a hatch door on the Mir space station.

Russian ground controllers were pleased with the finding, saying the problem could be fixed soon, and with relative ease, from inside the space station.

"All the tasks we placed before the crew have been carried out," Vladimir Solovyov, the head of mission control, declared after the spacewalk.

Cosmonauts Anatoly Solovyov and Pavel Vinogradov discovered that one of 10 main locks on the door was broken, which prevented a tight seal, said mission control deputy chief Viktor Blagov. The hatch on the Mir's Kvant-2 module had failed to close properly after a

spacewalk last November, resulting in a partial loss of pressure in the module. However, the situation was not considered serious, affecting only Kvant's docking chamber, which is sealed from the rest of the station.

Still, it has been inconvenient, forcing the crew to don their bulky spacesuits in a smaller compartment nearby.

During their examination, Solovyov and Vinogradov discovered that the spoke that inserts into the lock had become frozen and would need to be replaced, Mr. Blagov said.

But he said a tight seal was possible in the interim because the hatch also has 10 auxiliary locks. Only five of the auxiliary locks were latched after the previous spacewalk, which is why there was some leakage, Mr. Blagov said.

If all 10 auxiliary locks are latched properly, there

should be no leakage, he said, which will make it possible to make the repair from inside the space station without risking depressurisation.

After they finished the spacewalk, the crew pumped air into the docking chamber, and after 12 to 24 hours they will be able to determine whether there is still a leak.

Mr. Blagov said the hatch repair will be scheduled sometime after next Wednesday, when Solovyov will make a spacewalk with U.S. astronaut David Wolf.

During Friday's effort, the two cosmonauts also crawled along the hull to a neighbouring module to retrieve a box containing American tests of materials designed for use in the vacuum of space. Wolf filmed his crewmates' movements from inside the station.

During the upcoming mission, Solovyov and Wolf will gather another

set of U.S. scientific experiments attached to the outside of the orbiter. It will be the American's first walk in space.

Solovyov is the most experienced space walker in history. He has now logged more than 73 hours in open space on 15 walks, six of them coming since he arrived on his current Mir mission in August.

He and Vinogradov, who has now accompanied him on a total of five space walks, have managed to restore most of the power lost in last June's collision with a cargo ship.

Mir, the world's longest-flying space outpost, will mark its 12th anniversary in orbit next month, though it only had been expected to last for five years.

Despite continuing computer breakdowns, the latest of which occurred last week, Mir has been relatively quiet in recent months after a string of accidents last year.

Little mermaid's head returned

COPENHAGEN (AP) — A hooded man dropped off the head of the famed little mermaid statue at a television station Friday, three days after it was sawed off of her body.

The drop-off was filmed by the same freelance cameraman who got a call before dawn Tuesday to come to the Harbourside Park to see what had been done to the statue.

His footage, aired on TV2, shows a man in a hood walking towards the building of rival TV-Danmark, putting the bronze head on the ground and disappearing behind a parked car.

No arrests have been made. Police said they were examining the head for fingerprints and other clues.

The statue which is based on the Hans Christian Andersen tale, draws about a million visitors per year. It is cherished by Danes who see the mermaid as a national symbol comparable to Paris's Eiffel Tower or London's Big Ben.

"That's great. We'll save lots of money," Copenhagen city chief architect Otto Kaesner told TV2. A new head would have cost as much as 80,000 kroner (\$14,000).

The little mermaid, erected in 1913, has had its head sawed off once before, in 1964. No one was arrested for that vandalism, although several people including a radical artist have claimed responsibility. One of the statue's arms was cut off in 1983.



A unidentified police officer prepares to put the decapitated head of Copenhagen's Little Mermaid in a box near the buildings of TV-Danmark, a Danish television company in Skovlunde, a suburb some twenty kilometres west of Copenhagen (Reuters photo)

The original head was never found and was replaced with another modelled after the original.

Director of Moscow's giant Rossiya Hotel murdered

MOSCOW (AFP) — The managing director of the giant Rossiya Hotel, one of Moscow's best-known landmarks, was found shot dead Friday by the lift of his apartment block in what police said appeared to be a contract killing.

Russian ORT television described the shooting of Yevgeny Tsimbalistov, 49, as "the first contract killing in Russia in 1998."

his body at 9:27 a.m. (0627 GMT) on the ground floor of the apartment block, after having waited for him outside for 40 minutes. ITAR-TASS reported, quoting police.

Several years ago the previous managing director of the Rossiya was hacked to death with an axe, ITAR-TASS reported.

A year ago Moscow city hall announced plans to let New York property tycoon Donald Trump modernise the

Soviet-era Rossiya, a vast concrete block near Red Square built in 1967 with more than 6,000 beds. The project's cost was put at \$800 million.

Many Muscovites regard the decaying Rossiya as an insult to the fine churches including St. Basil's Cathedral situated near it, and refurbished luxury hotels such as the National and Metropol have overtaken it in the popularity stakes.

Albanian leader calls for dialogue with Serb authorities

PRISTINA, Yugoslavia (AFP) — Ibrahim Rugova, the ethnic Albanian leader in southern Serbia's troubled Kosovo province, said Friday that he was ready to open a dialogue with the Serbian authorities.

"The international community has striven in recent days to establish a dialogue between the legitimate representatives of Kosovo Albanians and the Serbian authorities," Mr. Rugova, head of the main Albanian Kosovo Democratic League (LDK), told reporters here.

Albanians "will remain firm in their positions — (for a) neutral and independent Kosovo," Mr. Rugova said.

warning that an explosion of violence in Kosovo "will be dangerous for the whole region."

Mr. Rugova said he had "no knowledge of the existence" of the underground Kosovo Liberation Army (UCK), which has claimed responsibility for a series of deadly attacks against Serb targets in the province in recent months.

The ethnic Albanian leader however said he could not confirm a report that Robert Gelbard, the U.S. special envoy for the Balkans who is due to come to the former Yugoslav region next week, would visit Kosovo.

Mr. Gelbard warned Tuesday that Belgrade's fail-

ure to hold talks with Kosovo activists could radicalise the situation in the province which was stripped of its autonomous status in 1989 by Serbia's parliament.

But Mr. Gelbard also warned that the UCK was "running the risk of being a terrorist" organisation, something he said the United States would not countenance.

Belgrade has been criticised for blatant human rights abuses in Kosovo where nine out of ten people are ethnic Albanians. Washington has linked the reintegration of Yugoslavia into the international community to a settlement of the Kosovo problem.

Top Bosnian Serb rival leaders meet but fail to reach accord

BRCKO, Bosnia-Herzegovina (AFP) — Bosnian Serb leaders locked in a power struggle met here Friday in another attempt to reach an agreement on a new government and parliament officials.

Biljana Plavsic, president of the Bosnian Serb entity, and her leading hardline opponent Momcilo Krajisnik, meeting in the Bosnian Serb entity Republika Srpska (RS) state holiday, failed to agree on power sharing.

However, Mr. Krajisnik told reporters he was "optimistic" about finding a solution to the crisis which erupted after his hardliners reject-

ed Ms. Plavsic's proposal for the new RS premier. "RS has to be in the hands of patriots and the agreement should be reached by Monday, Jan. 12 the latest," when the next assembly session was scheduled for, Mr. Krajisnik said.

After their meeting behind the close doors, Mr. Krajisnik and Ms. Plavsic have met with the representatives of Serb political parties represented in the assembly.

Mr. Krajisnik's nationalist supporters, who have lost their absolute majority in the new assembly, refuse to share power with relative moderates loyal to Ms. Plavsic, and last Saturday blocked the

appointment of a parliament speaker and prime minister.

Western-backed Plavsic proposed her candidate, economist Mladen Ivanic, for the premier's post, but hardliners from the Serb Democratic party (SDS) rejected her proposal.

Western officials in Bosnia gave their backing to her choice for the premiership. Deputy High Representative to Bosnia Jacques Klein said Thursday.

No one party holds an absolute majority in the parliament which emerged from early elections held on Nov. 22 and 23 to end a continuing power-struggle among Bosnian Serb leaders.

Czech probe launched into Bosnia helicopter crash

PRAGUE (AFP) — Czech investigators travelled to Bosnia Friday to probe the cause of a helicopter crash which injured 21 soldiers with the NATO-led SFOR force there, officials here said.

The Czech team was accompanied by two doctors, who will also organise the repatriation of some of those injured in the accident, the Czech defence ministry said.

Initial reports of the Russian-made Mi-17 helicopter crash near Bosanska Krupa, in north-east Bosnia Thursday, said it was caused by a breakdown in the helicopter's tail rotor.

The helicopter was transporting 20 Czech soldiers and one British soldier, who were seriously injured.

Stresovice military hospital was preparing to treat those victims who could be repatriated.

spokesman said. Bosnia's 600-man Czech contingent is part of the multinational peacekeeping force's southwestern division which is under British command.

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Editorial and advertising offices:
 Jordan Press Foundation,
 University Road, P.O. Box 6710, Amman, Jordan.
 Telephones: 684311, 699634, 667171, 603585
 Facsimile: 696183

E-mail: jtimes@go.com.jo
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Trick in upping ante

ISRAELI PRIME Minister Benjamin Netanyahu does not only want to scale-down the size of the Israeli redeployment in the West Bank, he also plans to delay the implementation of such withdrawal by three months. Netanyahu says he needs the time as a probationary period to test the Palestinians' respect for their commitments under the Oslo accords. But the real reason, it seems, is that the Israeli leader wants to toughen his bargaining position ahead of his upcoming trip to Washington for talks with President Bill Clinton and during the visit of the U.S. envoy to the Middle East, Denis Ross.

Netanyahu's attempt to raise the stakes comes amid new reports that his government has embarked on yet another settlement expansion in the still-occupied Palestinian territories.

What is happening in Israel today maybe explained by the departure from the government last week of Foreign Minister David Levy and the possible resignation of Defence Minister Yitzhak Mordechai. Both men are considered political doves in comparison with Netanyahu and the rest of his right-wing coalition members.

On the surface of things, the prime minister seeks what he calls "reciprocity" with the Palestinian National Authority (PNA) by insisting that the Palestinians live up to "their end of the bargain." The PNA is required to fight "terrorism," amend its charter where it calls for the destruction of Israel, and downsize its police force. If in fact Netanyahu is only seeking a quid pro quo with the Palestinians before he goes ahead with the Israeli withdrawal, an equitable and balanced formula can still be found under which both sides would be called upon to fulfill their respective Oslo accords commitments concurrently.

Just as Israel may wish to ascertain that the Palestinians fully respect their commitments, the PNA needs to know well in advance also that its full compliance would lead to the establishment of a Palestinian state on the West Bank and Gaza.

At a time when Netanyahu is so dependent on hardliners and ultra-religious factions who will resist any decision to withdraw from even one inch from what they call "Eretz Israel," the Palestinians cannot be expected to sacrifice all for nothing.

In order to achieve results, the prime minister must demonstrate first of all that he is capable of isolating the fanatics in his own coalition before he makes demands on the PNA to go further in meetings its obligations under past agreements. Otherwise, Netanyahu's call for reciprocity would ring hollow.

ARABIC PRESS COMMENTARIES

Al Arab Al Yawm's Mohammad Subeichi called on decision-makers to heed the results of a survey conducted by the Centre for Strategic Studies at the University of Jordan which revealed that more than 80 per cent of Jordanians still view Israelis as the enemy. The writer said that most of the Jordanians in the survey's sample expressed fear and anxiety about the ongoing events in the region and are worried because the Jordanian-Israeli peace treaty has not brought about the aspired peace neither did it bring with it the promised prosperity, but rather apprehension and worry. Peace is supposed to transform the former enemy into a friend, something which has not been realised as a result of the peace treaty, said the writer. Jordanians, for religious, national or other reasons have been largely in agreement that there can be no peace with Israel in light of its continued occupation of Arab land, its construction of settlements and its defaulting on the agreements it had signed with Jordan and the Palestinians, according to the writer. He said despite all that, Jordan should not abrogate the treaty and should continue to offer the Palestinians full backing and help solve the refugee problem which is a main issue for Palestine and Jordan.

Al Dustour's Suleiman Arar strongly criticised Jordan's attendance at the U.S.-Israeli-Turkish military exercises in the Mediterranean, saying it would damage Jordan's ties with the Arab countries. We can understand Israel's interest in the exercises because it is keen on securing a regional ally against the Arabs and we can understand Turkey's participation because it is bent on achieving ambitious gains in the Arab territories and to secure a permanent Turkish-occupied zone in northern Iraq to fend off Kurdish rebel danger, said the writer. But what we cannot understand is Jordan's attendance at these exercises by sending a single person to observe the war games, said the writer who questioned the wisdom behind such an act and whether this one person would be able to verify whether these exercises are real war games or mere naval search and rescue operations. The writer said that collaboration with Israel and Turkey is tantamount to helping the two countries impose their domination on the Arab region.

Jordanian Perspective

The writing was on the wall

By Dr. Musa Keilani

IT IS obvious that government trouble is the new line adopted by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to stall the implementation of his country's agreements with the Palestinians. Notwithstanding the hot waters he has landed himself in by not honouring his obligations to his coalition partners, the murky political situation brought about by the departure from government of Geshar leader David Levy has given Netanyahu a perfect excuse to present to U.S. President Bill Clinton later this month.

Well, that was indeed expected of Netanyahu, known for his dubious wheelings and dealings even with Jordan, which could be described as the Arab country closest to Israel at this point in time.

Netanyahu's deceitful promises and actions vis-a-vis Jordan have come despite Amman's firm adherence to its commitments under the peace treaty it signed with Israel in 1994.

His latest public argument, that peace treaties are not enough to guarantee Israel's security, is another blow to Jordan as well as Egypt, which signed a peace treaty 18 years ago.

Quite simply, it has become abundantly clear beyond any scintilla of reasonable doubt that we can entertain little hope of achieving a just, durable and comprehensive Arab-Israeli peace agreement as long as Netanyahu remains in power. The writing was on the wall since the 1996 election campaign began in Israel. They emerged even clearer in the months since

Netanyahu took office. But there were optimists among us and elsewhere who thought pragmatism and acceptance of realities would prompt the Likud leader to see the situation differently and relent on his rejection of Palestinian and Arab rights.

As such, we should perhaps rejoice at the cracks in the Israeli government structure, hoping that the right-wing domination of the political scene there would soon be a thing of the past. But the collapse of the present Israeli coalition or government does not mean that we have seen the last of Netanyahu until the next elections. He will remain very much in office because he has been elected prime minister by the people, and only the Knesset can impeach him.

That seems quite unlikely at this juncture. It means that we remain saddled with Netanyahu at least until the 1999 elections, which may or may not usher in a government which accepts and understands the real requirements of peace with the Arabs.

In the meantime, Netanyahu is playing up to the settlers' galleries by allowing the expansion of existing settlements and slowly paving the ground for Jewish colonies in the West Bank.

It is against this background that U.S. mediator Dennis Ross, launched his latest mission described as mainly aimed at preparing for Clinton's separate meetings with Netanyahu and Palestinian President Yasser Arafat this month.

We would have expected Ross to take a firm policy

stand that Netanyahu's political troubles are his own making and should not have any bearing on his country's obligations and commitments on the external front.

Instead, we have come to realise that Ross is being turned into an apologist for Netanyahu and trying to convince Arafat not to rock the boat and to accept whatever the Israeli premier is willing to give the Palestinians so as to ensure a resumption of the peace process for appearance sake.

That could also mean a new lease on political life for Netanyahu, but another setback for Arafat, who has already been weakened by having accepted the Israeli premier's piecemeal and downsized interpretations of the Oslo agreements.

Where does that take the region? Another three years of turmoil and uncertainty that would not only benefit the opponents of peace and give additional ammunition to extremists but also dig away at the middle-of-the-road, optimist Palestinian's confidence of regaining his/her rights sooner or later.

The moment of truth is here: Not for Netanyahu or Arafat, but for the U.S. administration, which has invested heavily in the Middle East peace process. If Washington is not willing to move in with determination to call the Israeli bluff and ensure that the Jewish state respects international legitimacy and U.N. resolutions, then all hope is lost for the much aspired-for peace in the Middle East.

Letter from Scotland

Learning from the burning sticks tradition

By Peter Hinchcliffe

THE END of any Christian year in Scotland is a hazardous undertaking. Theoretically the Scottish tradition is to go for Hogmanay (New Year's Eve) and play down Christmas. The cynics (i.e., the English) used to claim that this was because the Scots are too careful with their money — too mean, in other words — to want to buy presents for other people. A really clever Scot is one who gets given a bottle of whisky on Christmas Day (probably by a non-Scot) and drinks it on New Year's. All by himself. But commercialism has changed all that. Scotland celebrates at Christmas time the same shopping spree, the same over indulgence, and the same collective hangover, as does the rest of the United Kingdom. And it still manages to recover in time for the New Year. The centre of Edinburgh was closed to all except 150,000 ticket holders on New Year's Eve and the city saw Europe's biggest Hogmanay street party continuing to breakfast time on Jan. 1.

Where we live is The Borders, the part of Scotland that merges peacefully and unobtrusively into England. The Borders do not go in for Hogmanay. Here New Year's Eve is known as Old Year's Night and it seems a much gentler affair. One ceremony, still occasionally practised, is to gather around a bonfire and for those present to toss sticks into the flames — each stick representing something bad which that person wanted to put behind them as the Old Year dies away. Another custom is to "first foot." To call after midnight on your neighbour — yours being the first foot to enter your friend's home in the brand new year. Traditionally the first footer brings two presents — a

lump of coal (or wood) to symbolise fuel and a piece of bread — the gift of food. Probably both traditions coming from more primitive times — pagan rather than Christian. And no worse for that.

We had a quiet Old Year's Night. All our family-daughters and their husbands and other in-laws and friends. Glancing out of the window at the stunningly starry sky characteristic of countryside far from any artificially illuminated town I saw a sickle crescent in the southern sky. My first glimpse of this year's Ramadan moon! It reminded me of the last four Ramadans spent so happily in Jordan. Six more in Kuwait, four in Dubai and six, at least, in the Yemen. It crossed my mind that in two years time or so Christmas and Eid Al Fitr will coincide. What a treat for Muslims in Scotland with at least three reasons (well, plausible excuses in the case of two of them) for celebration inside one glorious self indulgent week.

But that is for the future. This year the start of the holy month has coincided with Old Year's Night. I could not help wondering who was casting what sticks into the final bonfire of 1997. Not so much in Scotland, although I had a twig or two to contribute, but in the Middle East. From my standpoint — in Amman up to April and from the safe distance of these islands since then — it seems to me that last year is one not to be mourned. The mother of many sticks to be burned without regret. A year of lost opportunities in the Middle East peace process (we have our own stalled process much nearer to home, in Northern Ireland). The knock on effect that this stalemate has outside Israel and the West Bank. On anti-

tudes towards Iraq. Why should Washington wield the big stick on one side and indulge in a soft-shoe shuffle on the other? This was a recurrent theme in the Arab media during the UNSCOM inspectors crisis. I should add in parenthesis that I did note however a marked change in tone in the Jordanian press at least with regard to Iraq following the execution of Jordanian students for comparatively minor offences. The very sad episode is a salutary reminder of the real nature of Saddam Hussein's regime quite apart from the question of the elusive weapons of mass destruction. Did he burn a stick on Old Year's Night? Or the Mossad mastermind who nearly got away with a murderous attack in Amman. State sponsored terrorism at its most blatant. Did he feel that 1997 was a year to forget? Did he start a forest fire in his search for oblivion?

But I am not sure that burning sticks are really appropriate for the present circumstances of the Middle East. We do not need so much to forget the horrors of the past — to burn them out of a consciousness but more to learn from them. The French aristocrats on the eve of the storming of the Bastille in 1789 had forgotten nothing nor learnt anything. And look what happened to them. I never cease to wonder at the marvel of the work of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Perhaps only a Nelson Mandela could have set one up. Where the sticks of the past are not burned but brandished. Not in anger but in sorrow and in the expectation (more than the hope) of forgiveness. Reconciliation not recrimination.

The Middle East is not South Africa. Nor have the Palestinians produced a Mandela. Perhaps an assassin's bullet destroyed the

prospect of an Israeli De Klerk. I believe that Rabin had the vision, as did De Klerk with regard to his white constituency, of coming to terms with reality. In De Klerk's case the inevitability of a Black African government. His cooperation ensured that the transfer of power was peaceful and democratic. As for Rabin he, unlike De Klerk, was dealing from a position of strength. Nothing inevitable about a Palestinian state. But I am sure he realised that the long-term security of Israel entering its second half-century was through cooperation and friendship with the Palestinians not continued confrontation with them. A Palestinian state would eventually be the price to be paid. And for the sake of lasting peace, paid willingly. Mr. Netanyahu, perhaps because he is increasingly a prisoner of his hard right, sends out different signals. Reconciliation is apparently not in his vocabulary. He continues to wave sticks, which would be much better burnt. And both sides, Palestinians as well as Israelis, need to first foot 1998 with positive words of comfort and cooperation rather than the tired old slogans of confrontation and collision. But I am not hopeful.

We move to Northern Ireland in a few days. More Middle Eastern studies in an academic and political setting very different from Scotland. There are parallels with Palestine and South Africa to be made with no Mandela or indeed a Rabin in sight. I will let you know how I get on.

The writer, a retired diplomat, was the British ambassador to Jordan until March 1997. He contributed this article to the Jordan Times.

Commentators seek justification for Jordan's attendance at U.S.-Israeli-Turkish military wargames

Reviewed by Elia Nasrallah

THE LOCAL dailies gave extensive coverage to the U.S.-Israeli-Turkish military exercises in the Mediterranean Sea, and nothing said by the Jordanian government can make it otherwise, according to the writer. The Jordanian public has not been told about the wisdom behind taking part in such an event, and the Kingdom's foreign policy remains shrouded in mystery. Adwan said. The Jordanian people, he added, yearn to know the facts and would like to be told about the gains which they could secure by involving their country in an event which is clearly to the advantage of Israel and Turkey.

Al Dustour's Jihad Momani echoed calls on the Jordanian government to provide reasonable justification for attending the Israeli-Turkish military exercises. He said it is the citizens' right to know the benefits of attending the exercises and inviting anger from the Arab World against Jordan's behaviour. The three parties taking part in the exercises can easily convince their people about their benefits, and they do not conceal their enmity towards the Arabs, particularly against Syria, but Jordan has failed to provide any logical justification, said the writer. It is the duty of Parliament to convey the public's views to the government and demand a reason for the government's failure to consult with Jordan's sister Arab states before taking the decision. Momani said.

Al Ra'i's Sultan Al Hattab warned that David Levy's departure from the Israeli government could mean that Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu would become more and more adamant in his position and attend them as an observer, he said. Jordan has no interest at all in attending the military exercises in the Mediterranean Sea, and nothing said by the Jordanian government can make it otherwise, according to the writer. The Jordanian public has not been told about the wisdom behind taking part in such an event, and the Kingdom's foreign policy remains shrouded in mystery. Adwan said. The Jordanian people, he added, yearn to know the facts and would like to be told about the gains which they could secure by involving their country in an event which is clearly to the advantage of Israel and Turkey.

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Al Ra'i's Sultan Al Hattab warned that David Levy's departure from the Israeli government could mean that Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu would become more and more adamant in his position and

more determined to uphold his policy of ruining the Oslo accord and continuing the process of building settlements on Arab lands. Left alone to handle the Israeli domestic and foreign affairs, Netanyahu is more likely to take an even harder line and is bound to become hostage to the small Israeli political parties in the present coalition government, who back Netanyahu's policies regarding the settlement programmes, according to the writer. He said the Arab countries are expected to see a more extreme Israeli government bent on holding on to the occupied Arab territories and disregarding the Palestinian people's rights.

Al Dustour daily expressed pessimism over the outcome of U.S.

THE WEEK IN PRINT

envoy Dennis Ross's mission in the region, saying that he has no chance of making any breakthrough. The Palestinians will grow more desperate and frustrated as the U.S. envoy will find his mission impossible due to Netanyahu's adamant stand and his government's intransigence vis-a-vis peace with the Palestinians. The paper said the policies of the U.S. will soon be put to the test when President Bill Clinton meets with Netanyahu and Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat in Washington. It should be emphasised, said the paper, that as long as Washington

does not exercise any form of pressure on the Jewish state to abide by the peace accords, all future missions by Ross or other envoys will end in failure.

Fahed Faneek of Al Ra'i said the Arabs have every reason to be pessimistic as a result of Levy's resignation because Netanyahu will have a stronger free hand to handle Israel's foreign affairs. Backed by 61 votes in parliament Netanyahu has secured the endorsement of the fiscal budget, and without Levy, he feels free to cement his ties with the smaller political parties which back the prime minister's policies with regard to the peace process, said the writer. In fact Netanyahu will be increasingly forced to accept the smaller parties' blackmail because without these parties his coalition government would fall, Dr. Faneek said. He said as long as these small parties do not want peace with the Palestinians and reject the Oslo accord, the prime minister has no alternative but to follow their whims and desires.

Al Aswaq's Rashid Hassan wrote about Algeria where terrorist groups have been massacring innocent civilians. Blaming the Arab and Islamic countries for standing idly by and watching the massacres without lifting a finger, Hassan said that if the Algerian people are left alone more tragedies are likely to occur and more victims are bound to fall. What is happening in Algeria does not tolerate further silence and passive stands, and the time has come for the Arab League at least to take some action to save the lives of innocent people, said the writer. Words of condemnation can in no

way bring relief to the Algerians who, said the writer, are in need of practical steps in association with the Algerian government to put an end to the horrible crimes.

Sultan Al Hattab of Al Ra'i placed the main blame on the Algerian government and armed forces for assuming a neutral role in the ongoing crimes committed in Algeria. The writer said the government, which blames terrorist groups and the Islamists for being behind the massacres should take action against the perpetrators in deed rather than words. If the terrorists succeed in escaping retribution for their criminal acts, similar massacres could happen in other parts of the Arab and Islamic worlds, said the writer. It is not sufficient for the Algerian government to point an accusing finger at groups which it calls terrorists, the writer added, and the public demands that practical steps be taken to address the situation.

Al Arab Al Yawm's Mohammad Subeichi said that the Jordanian people's morals have weakened and their national zeal has waned due to the government's policies. With regard to foreign policy the public was dismayed over the government's unstable stand towards Iraq and is frustrated over its stand towards Israel and its actions, according to the writer. At the economic level, he said, Jordanian citizens are dissatisfied with the privatisation policy because they fear that the country's wealth, such as phosphate and potash, will eventually fall into the hands of foreigners including Israelis.

Asia crisis throwing millions out of work

HONG KONG (AFP) — Millions of workers are being thrown out of work as the Asian economic crisis deepens, officials and analysts around the region said Thursday.

Thailand, the first casualty of the collapse, has already seen a hike in its jobless rate and officials said they expected a million more people to be out of work this year.

Thailand's labour ministry said some 1.8 million Thais were out of work by the end of 1997 and some officials said the figure could reach 2.8 million already been laid off since the crisis began as companies struggle to meet even minimum wage demands.

The manpower ministry has predicted that national unemployment will rise to around six million in 1998.

while the state-sanctioned labour union has warned unemployment could reach 11 per cent of the country's estimated workforce of more than 90 million people.

In China, officials predict 11 million workers will lose their jobs in 1998 as reforms of the inefficient state sector bite, and on Thursday for the first time admitted that the regional crisis was hitting exports.

Malaysian Deputy Home Minister Mohd. Tajol Rosli Ghazali has warned that an estimated one million people are threatened with unemployment there.

He said foreign workers would have to bear the brunt of the country's economic slump by giving up their jobs to the locals.

Militant labour unions have threatened to stage an

all-out strike should the new government push through legislation to allow lay-offs.

Seoul anticipates a five per cent unemployment rate this year, which would represent 1.5 million people, but the issue is politically explosive.

In Vietnam, thousands of workers in Ho Chi Minh City were laid off in the last quarter of 1997, official figures showed.

The Vietnam News daily said many foreign joint ventures based in the southern city blamed the layoffs on the regional financial crisis which affected their parent companies in South Korea, Hong Kong, Taiwan and Thailand.

In the Philippines, President Fidel Ramos has told legions of Filipino workers in Asia to look for jobs in

other parts of the world if there are mass job cuts.

More than four million Filipinos out of the population of 70 million already work abroad — most of them in Asia and the Middle East.

Even mighty Singapore said it expects a rise in unemployment as the jobless rate hit 1.3 per cent in September last year.

The Asian financial storm has also affected Australia which faces the loss of 1.5 billion dollars (\$1 billion) in revenue and up to 24,000 jobs in the tourism industry alone as a result of the Asian economic crisis.

Analyst Alan Midwood, who produces the quarterly Queensland Development Report, said he believed about 380,000 fewer people — 240,000 of them tourists — would visit Australia this

year.

Wealthy Hong Kong's financial sector, bloodied by months of attacks on the territory's stock market, is seeing wide-scale retrenchments with analysts saying the worse was yet to come.

"There are cuts coming specially in the financial industry and there are indications that even the most successful financial companies are looking to scale things back whether in salary cuts or actual retrenchments," an analyst who refused to be identified said.

Percy Au-Yang, head researcher of DBS Securities, said the financial environment in Hong Kong "is expected to be very tough," with a growing number of companies filing for bankruptcy.

"I think, unemployment

will go up this year. There are a number of industries hit especially those rich real estate agencies," he told AFP.

Estate agents are already shutting up shop as the crisis drives buyers away from the exorbitant property market.

Hong Kong posted a marginally higher unemployment rate of 2.4 per cent in the three months to November last year.

Analysts predict the unemployment rate for the financial sector this year could go as high as 20 per cent.

Taiwan claims to be the only exception to the region's jobless woes with officials predicting a flat unemployment rate of 2.7 per cent for this year.

HOROSCOPE

FORECAST FOR SATURDAY, JANUARY 10, 1998

By Linda C. Black, Tribune Media Services, Inc.

ARIES: (March 21 to April 19) A friend might be bossy today. Instead of resisting, use this to your advantage. Ask this person to teach you something. You could wind up learning a valuable new skill. And you'll make an absolutely fabulous impression on your friend.

TAURUS: (April 20 to May 20) You could get money from an unexpected source this morning; someone who's turned you down a thousand times before could finally come through. It may be as much a surprise to this person as it is to you. Later this afternoon, you'll get a shove in the right direction. Work you've done in the past is finally starting to pay off.

GEMINI: (May 21 to June 21) You're looking very attractive to a very attractive person. No need to let on that you can't afford the price of lunch. Work through it instead, and diet at the same time. If you're really lucky, the other person will offer to buy. Today, it looks like that's a winning formula.

CANCER: (June 22 to July 21) Phone tag this morning is making you crazy and costing you money. Go with the flow. Instead of talking to Person A, go to Person B and C. You'll learn more than you ever wanted to know. You like games of strategy. Today, take the long way around and you may discover an opportunity you never would have known existed.

LEO: (July 22 to August 21) Your sweetheart may be in the process of changing a decision. What looked OK yesterday may not be quite as attractive today. Don't get defensive. Discuss the matter tonight. If you can involve a third party, it'll be easier to be objective. A friend can help you stay calm. Don't worry. You can get it all talked out.

VIRGO: (August 22 to September 22) Stay on your toes to keep up with the action today. There are all sorts of interesting developments. People who are normally very nice could get cranky. Don't take it seriously. This evening, follow through on a project you and your sweetheart have been working on. Don't start a new one yet, however. Hold off for a while.

LIBRA: (September 23 to October 22) Be very careful with secrets. Don't talk to a far-away friend about a situation near at hand. It might seem to be a safe enough thing to do, but it's not. The information will get back to the other person, and you'll be in trouble. It will be easy to talk people into doing what you want today, but remember not to tell everything you know.

SCORPIO: (October 23 to November 21) Paying bills could make a major dent in your pocketbook. There's a lot more money going out than coming in. A roommate may help you find another source of revenue. Discuss your options this evening. He or she is coming from a slightly different perspective, and that's what makes the input more valuable.

SAGITTARIUS: (November 22 to December 21) The good news is that you'll be making more money. The bad news is that you'll be working harder. Attend a class this evening, and you'll be motivated to try something you've always wanted to do but never quite knew how. Once you get the information, you'll be launched into a great new adventure. Go for it.

CAPRICORN: (December 22 to January 20) Your workload is hectic, and travel may be required. You're trying to be two or three places at once. Communication is important, and today that's even more noticeable. Ask an expert to give you a hand. You tend to do things the hard way, but today you don't have time.

AQUARIUS: (January 21 to February 19) You and your sweetheart need to discuss plans for the future. Expenses are coming up, and you should decide how to spend the money. There's a different of opinion, so it takes a while to reach an agreement. But, it'll be fun to hang out together for a while.

PISCES: (February 20 to March 20) There's confusion today, and you're in the middle. People are coming into your life and going out with alarming rapidity. Not to worry. You flourish in this stimulating environment. If you lose your sense of direction, rely on a friend who loves you. He or she will point you the right way.

Birthstone of January: Garnet — Rose Quartz

U.S., IMF step up emergency measures on Asia crisis

WASHINGTON (AFP) — The United States and the IMF (International Monetary Fund) stepped up efforts Friday to break a dizzying slide in Asian currencies and share prices amid new signs that the region's financial crisis is far from over.

The most immediate concern was Indonesia, whose

freefalling currency fuelled worries about the possibility of a full-scale financial and political collapse that could hamstring any region-wide recovery.

Reacting to overnight plunges in Asia, share prices fell again early Friday on Wall Street, shedding 78.71 points to 7,723.91 at mid-

morning. Dealers cited heavy selling of shares with strong Asian exposure.

South Korea, buoyed by a \$57 billion IMF bailout, meanwhile took a heavy hit Friday from Moody's, which described an agreement by U.S. banks to a 90-day rollover of South Korean loans as "equal to a default."

Late Thursday, the IMF announced that its top two officials would travel to Indonesia to negotiate a "strengthening and acceleration" of Jakarta's \$43 billion bailout package.

That move, coordinated with Washington, came as President Bill Clinton spoke by phone with Singapore Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong and Indonesian President Suharto to underscore U.S. support for IMF programmes.

The White House also announced that Deputy Treasury Secretary Larry Summers, "along with representatives from the State Department and the National Security Council, will travel to the region shortly."

"The United States has significant national security and economic interests in a stable and prosperous Asia Pacific," it said in a statement.

"That is why the United States has supported the economic reform programmes developed by several Asian countries with the IMF and has stressed the importance of their successful implementation."

U.S. officials are notably keen to persuade the Indonesian president, in power for 32 years, to stick to the terms

of the IMF bailout and clean up Indonesia's deeply troubled banking and financial systems.

They blame Indonesia's tumbling currency and share prices in part for depressing markets across the region and fear a default on South Korean loans could worsen Japan's six-year-old recession — dragging down the global economy.

Analysts here were dubious about what the U.S. and IMF missions to Asia would accomplish, saying it's now up to Asian leaders to make painful political choices for the long-term health of their economies.

"They can't do anything. This is a political crisis," said Robert Manning, Asia scholar at the Council on Foreign Relations. "Indonesia is the most explosive situation, and they don't care about the IMF. They care about stability."

Another economist following the crisis who asked not to be named was equally circumspect: "They're just looking for a way to give the Indonesians confidence," he said.

"But there's going to be a strong tendency to prop up Suharto."

Private forecasters and

U.S. authorities say fallout on the U.S. economy, the world's largest, appears slight so far, with the Federal Reserve predicting U.S. economic growth in 1998 will slow by 0.50-0.75 per cent.

Peter Jaquette, senior economist at the WEFA forecasting group in Pennsylvania, expects growth to slow just 0.3 per cent to 2.5 per cent, which might be just enough to keep the Federal Reserve from raising interest rates. So long as things don't get a whole lot worse, he said, lower commodity and import prices coupled with slightly slower growth and unchanged interest rates shouldn't mean higher U.S. unemployment.

Market players worried this week that the IMF's cool reaction to Indonesia's new budget could prompt it to delay the next tranche of \$3 billion in bailout funds and trigger a major debt crisis.

Overnight, Hong Kong share prices lost 3.9 per cent, Singapore 7.4 per cent, Manila 8.3 per cent, Bangkok 2.9 per cent, Seoul 2.4 per cent and Jakarta 1.2 per cent. Tokyo also slid but by a tiny 0.2 per cent.

Regional currencies pulled back from the brink after President Clinton placed calls to the Indonesian and Singaporean leaders, boosting hopes of a more active U.S. role in stemming regional financial turmoil.

But analysts around the world warned that any permanent relief hinged on regional governments cleaning up their economic policies.

Bank of Jordan launches 'BOJ Global Capital Preserved Fund' and leads International Tobacco and Cigarettes Company Bonds Issue

BANK OF Jordan (BOJ), the sixth largest bank in the Kingdom, is Issue Manager, Custodian and Settlement Agent for a five years corporate bonds issue for International Tobacco and Cigarettes Company (ITCC). The bonds issue, which will be privately placed, will be marketed to Jordanians and foreign investors who are looking to penetrate into the Jordanian market and enjoy low risk investment tools in addition to enhancing their returns just as interest rates are on the decline.

The issue size with a nominal amount of JD3.5 million (approximately \$4.9 million) will have a fixed coupon of 11 per cent per annum which will be paid semi-annually. Minimum participation will be equal to a nominal amount of JD10,000 and 20 per cent of the issue will be redeemed annually. Also, the company has the right to call back the

remaining of the issue after 2.5 years.

Such an issue will contribute to the foundation of a secondary market that will allow corporates and investors to manage their liquidity by tapping into capital market instruments. The move comes in line with the Central Bank of Jordan directives to activate the capital market in Jordan through such fixed income instruments.

Furthermore, Bank of Jordan will launch its "BOJ Global Capital Preserved Fund" with the size of \$10 million which will be denominated in dollars early this year. The fund will give the opportunity to small and medium size investors in Jordan and the Middle East to benefit from international investment markets and enjoy the privilege of preserving their capital and a minimum investment return of four per cent per annum.

The fund which will have a minimum partici-

pation of \$10,000 will mature after five years and will have a diverse investment strategy that allows investors to increase their returns by benefiting from the movements of more than one international market. Although the fund has a five years maturity period, it is structured in a way that will allow investors to get in or out of the fund every three month at the net asset value hence, keeping it very liquid.

BOJ, a pioneer in such investment products, is already managing assets for individual clients in foreign currencies with an average return of 12 per cent annually on the dollar. Moreover, BOJ has developed some investment products that are tailor made for financial institutions which allow them to trade in the foreign exchange markets with a preserved capital feature.

DA JANI
JEWELLERS
Since 1975
Reopens normally
Amra Forum Hotel Shops - Amman

THE Daily Crossword Edited by Wayne Robert Williams

ACROSS
1. Imitations
6. Favorites
10. Roosevelt's dog
14. Tehran resident
15. Lotion ingredient, often
16. Trojan War hero
17. Shake
20. Misfortunes
21. Author Bagnold
22. Goat groups
23. Light touches
24. Track ticket
25. Lion, at times
29. Umbrellas
34. Bars between wheels
35. Incite
36. Classic Olds
37. Rattle
41. Fuss
42. "Lohengrin" lady
43. Temporary pattern of behavior
44. Counterattack
47. Amends maker
48. Can, province
49. Marine shokers
51. Cry to be heard
54. Gomer of Mayberry
55. Very dry
59. Roll
62. My goodness!
63. Precipitation
64. Drive forward
65. Tills and Tonne
66. The Charles' dog
67. Bullwinkle, e.g.

DOWN
1. Islands discovered by Tasman
2. Sea east of the Caspian
3. Actor Malden
4. Seth's son
5. Military address
6. Whitefish
7. "Shake, Rattle, and Roll"

8. Hammered on a slant
9. _ of Gallies
10. Aspects
11. Open a bit
12. Animal lat
13. Chopping tools
18. Equipment
19. Flushing stadium
23. Chilean currency
24. Writer Harte
25. Detection device
26. Oxygen compound
27. Biographer of FDR
28. Cook bk. item
30. Taj Mahal site
31. Church instrument
32. Tenancy period
33. Temperate
35. W. coast sch.
38. Set one inside another
39. Chooses
40. Greek P

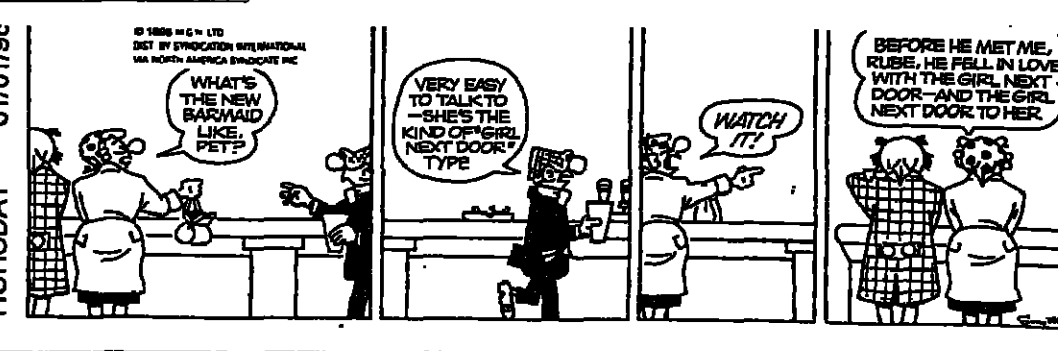
45. Boxing-match fractions
46. Involved with
47. Smart guy?
50. Bonnet or Sakura
51. Pipe part
52. Overwhelming
53. By mouth

54. Sch. orgs.
55. Bullets, briefly
56. "Man."
57. Stanton film
58. Angry states
59. Broad valley
60. Gun lobby, briefly
61. Set sights

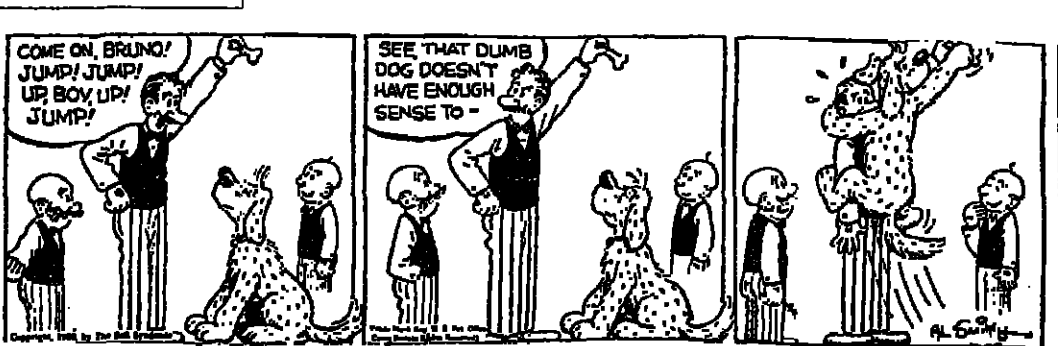
Peanuts



Andy Capp



Mutt'n' Jeff



THE BETTER HALF. By Glasbergen



JUMBLE. THAT SCRAMBLED WORD GAME

Unscramble these four Jumbles, one letter to each square, to form four ordinary words.

FRIGE
REFIA
INBON
LABERV

Answer: THE

Yesterday's Jumbles: CUBIC RUSTY FOSSIL TANKER
Answer: A good way to comply with a school dress code - SKIRT THE ISSUE

Daily Business Beat

A review of news from the Arabic Press

Small industries have better chance to cut production costs — study

SMALL PAPER and chemical industries have a greater chance to cut production costs if full production capacity is utilised as the idle capacity for each of the mentioned industries is 42.3 per cent and 61.2 per cent respectively, a study on the competitive capability of Jordanian products shows. According to the study, prepared by the Royal Scientific Society, mining and textile firms among medium-size industries have a greater chance to reduce production costs by expanding the use of idle capacity which stands at 47.3 per cent and 46.0 per cent of the overall production costs in each of the mentioned categories respectively.

In large industries, paper, tolls, food and chemical industries were found to have a greater chance to lower production costs if all available production capacity in each of them was utilised. The study listed the idle capacity at 63.8 per cent, 34.0 per cent, 47.0 per cent and 46.9 per cent in each of the paper, tolls, food and chemical industries respectively.

The study pointed out that all small industries, except those in the chemical sector, are "safe" when Jordan joins the World Trade Organisation (WTO) or signs a partnership agreement with any country or group of countries requiring around 40 per cent of value added for origin certification. Small industries were seen highly dependent on local production elements and not imported ones.

In this regard, whatever was applicable for the small industries was found to be also applicable to medium-size industries. But still, small industries were seen to be farther from the danger circle than medium-size industries.

As for large industries, basic mining, paper and mineral ones were classified as safe for obtaining a certificate of origin which requires a 40 per cent value added input. But other large industries were found to be unable to achieve the 40 per cent level and, as such, will not be able to carry a Jordanian certificate of origin unless it reduces the foreign input or raises the local value added elements (Al Dustour).

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year-end closing of financial books. This activity led to an increase in turnover during the last week of 1997, he added.

"This caused an unjustified hike in share prices which did not reflect the real value of these shares," Mr. Nageeb explained.

The broker said that "supply in the market exceeded demand," adding that "no major contracts were recorded in the market in the past week."

The AFM's weekly bulletin indicated that the turnover in the first week of this year amounted to JD5.8

million, down from JD8.7 million in the previous week, or 33 per cent decrease.

The weekly report indicated that the general share price has dropped from 169.2 points to 167.93, or 1.31 points.

Mr. Nageeb attributed the decline in the general price index to the slight drop in the prices of shares of major companies and banks, especially the Arab Bank.

The shares of the Arab Bank, the Kingdom's leading financial institution, has dropped to JD324, down from JD330, Mr. Nageeb

said. "Last week was the beginning of the new year. Most of the dealers were cautious and preferred to wait and see what could happen in the coming few weeks," said Mr. Nageeb.

"Rumours have split in the market regarding the outcomes of the balance sheets and profits of several companies for the past year. The good results of some firms will influence the dealers where to spend their money and which shares they should buy," added Mr. Nageeb.

The weekly bulletin indicated that the lion's share of the turnover went to the banking sector, with a turnover amounting to JD3.5 million, or 61 per cent, followed by industrial sector with JD1.3 million, or 23.6 per cent. Services sector ranked third with JD880,000, 15.2 per cent and insurance sector trailed with JD5,000.

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Social Security Corporation earns JD77 million in investment returns

THE SOCIAL SECURITY Corporation collected round JD193 million in various forms of income during 1997. Of this amount, JD116 million were in insurance premiums paid by subscribers and JD77 million in investment returns. The corporation's total investments at the end of last September amounted to JD965 million compared to JD865 million at the

end of 1996.

The investments are spread as follows: 17.22 per cent in equity in companies, 25.17 per cent in financing, 5.65 per cent in real estate and 51.96 per cent in banks.

The corporation invests in more than 100 public shareholding companies for a total of JD166 million (Al Ra'i).

REUTERS The Business of Information

Major Currencies & Cross Rates

Currency	USD	DEM	GBP	CHF	JPY	CAD	ITL	NLG	FRF
US Dollar	1.0000	1.6212	0.6191	1.4786	121.54	1.4226	1788.40	2.0522	6.0398
DE Mark	0.6191	1.0000	0.3397	0.8109	72.27	0.7811	982.00	1.1288	3.3469
GB Sterling	1.6193	2.9421	1.0000	2.3850	212.63	2.2879	2890.86	3.3166	9.8451
CH Franc	0.6772	1.2320	0.4196	1.0000	89.00	0.8628	1210.89	138.86	4.1211
JP Yen	0.0076	1.3842	0.4705	1.1228	1.0000	0.0816	11.51	155.87	4.6302
CA Dollar	0.7029	1.2632	0.4259	1.0260	1.08	1.0000	1244.05	1.4232	4.2271
IT Lira	0.0006	1.0164	0.3454	0.8924	1363.33	0.7946	1.00	11.45	3.4033
NL Guilder	0.4873	0.8770	0.3015	0.7139	64.04	0.6933	672.47	1.00	2.9708
FR Franc	0.1641	0.2986	0.1015	0.2420	21.55	0.2333	33.65	33.6500	1.00

Middle Eastern Currencies

Currency	USD	JOD	SAR	BATH	QAT	KUW	AED	LBP	EGP
US Dollar	1.0000	0.7090	3.7520	0.3770	3.6408	0.3058	3.6729	1527.00	3.4040
Jordan Dinar	1.4104	1.0000	5.2920	0.5317	5.1361	0.4313	5.1904	2153.74	4.8011
Saudi Riyal	0.2665	0.1890	1.0000	0.2706	0.2665	0.2706	0.2665	406.98	0.9072
Bahrain Dinar	2.65	1.8906	9.8923	1.0000	9.8923	8.66	0.8111	8.74	4050.40
Qatar Dinar	0.2747	0.1947	1.0305	1.0305	1.0000	0.0840	1.01	419.41	0.9360
Kuwait Dinar	3.2701	2.3158	12.2655	1.2328	11.91	12.01	4893.46	0.9360	0.9360
Emirates Dinar	0.2723	0.1947	1.0305	1.0305	1.0000	0.0840	1.01	419.41	0.9360
Lebanese 1000	0.65	0.4643	2.4571	0.2469	2.3843	0.2003	2.4053	1.00	2.2292
Egyptian	0.2939	0.2083	1.1022	0.1108	1.0696	0.0898	1.0790	448.59	1.00

Energy

Oil	Last	Previous
Brent	15.39	15.66
W. Texas	16.89	16.98
Bonny	15.39	15.66
Dubai	13.95	13.97
UL Gas	166.00	164.00

JOD Cross Rates

Currency	Buy	Sell
US Dollar	0.708	0.710
DE Mark	1.1495	1.1522
GB Sterling	0.3874	0.3893
CH Franc	0.4783	0.4807
FR Franc	0.1167	0.1163
JP Yen	0.034	0.0337
NL Guilder	0.3438	0.3455
IT Lira	0.3946	0.3966

Source: Central Bank of Jordan.

Main Equity Indices

Bourse	Index	Value	Chng	% Chng	High	Low	Pr Cls
New York	DOW JONES	7737.36	-65.28	-0.84	7800.13	7705.47	7802.62
New York	S&P 500	948.98	-7.07	-0.74	956.05	945.45	956.05
London	FT-SE 100	6140.6	-98.5	-1.61	6230.1	6128.7	6231.1
Tokyo	NIKKEI 225	14995.1	-24.08	-0.16	15065.5	14724.3	15019.2
Paris	CAC 40	2922.04	-32.9	-1.11	2941.88	2902.13	2954.94
Frankfurt	DAX	4238.94	-110.29	-2.54	4268.99	4230.01	4347.23

Absence of substantial deals depresses turnover at AFM

By Tareq Ayyoub
Special to the Jordan Times

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World Swimming Championships

China seeks to limit damage from latest drug scandal

PERTH (AFP) — China on Friday ordered home swimmer Yuan Yuan and her coach from the world championships here after the Australian authorities confirmed she had been carrying an illegal drug.

The Chinese State Sports Commission announced in Beijing that 21-year-old Yuan and her coach, Zhou Zhewen, had been recalled because of the drug seizure. It said they face further "severe" sanctions.

And the head of the Chinese delegation here said Yuan and her coach made a mistake in bringing banned growth hormone drugs into Australia and they should be responsible for the consequences.

In a damning day for Chinese swimming just two days before they compete at the world championships here, Australian Customs confirmed that the substance found in Yuan's baggage at Sydney Airport Thursday was a banned human growth hormone.

Zhou admitted to a customs official that he had packed the 13 vials of somatotrophin into Yuan's baggage but claimed it wasn't for the team. Instead, he was to pass it to someone in Australia.

World swimming federation FINA said the pair will appear before the federation's doping panel and they would face a minimum four-year suspension from swimming if they are found guilty of trafficking under FINA's rules.

Chinese delegation leader Shi Tianshu would not say who the person the banned substances were intended for in Australia.

"The Chinese swimming delegation holds that the Chinese swimming team must not carry anything for other people on the way to taking part in other championships," Shi told a press conference.

"So what these two members of our delegation have done is a violation of the discipline of our delegation, it was definitely wrong," he said, adding the delegation respected the decision of Australian Customs.

"Judging the mistake made by these two people, the Chinese delegation has already decided that we shall deprive these two people of the right to participate in the current world championship," he said.

FINA secretary Gunnar Werner said prior to the Chinese press conference that Yuan and Zhou would be required to go before the doping panel before they returned home.



Chinese swimmer Yuan Yuan (C) is escorted by police after arriving in Perth January 8 for the World Swimming Championships. Customs officers at Sydney airport seized what is believed to be a quantity of growth hormones which were found in the baggage of Yuan Yuan en route to Perth (Reuters photo)



Chinese swimmer Le Jingyi removes her sunglasses to replace them with goggles at a training session for the 8th World Swimming Championships in Perth (Reuters photo)

"The Chinese delegation has promised not to send them home before the hearing," Werner said, adding the panel would meet within 24 hours.

Werner said FINA had no reason to ban the total Chinese team from the world championship and the Chinese team coach agreed.

They were not under FINA jurisdiction at the time."

A police guard was put on the Chinese swimming team in Perth, which also underwent drug tests as they pursued preparations for the championships under the cloud of a second major drug scandal in four years.

The Australian Sports Drugs Agency did not say how many tests were conducted or whether it was linked to the drug seizure.

Sydney airport customs seized a flask Thursday from Yuan's baggage containing 13 vials and the Australian government confirmed they contained a human growth hormone which is banned by FINA and only allowed into Australia with a medical permit.

A customs ministry spokesman said the customs department was also considering further action.

The scandal will be a major blow to China's tarnished reputation and there were calls for life bans for the use of growth hormones.

"After the Asian Games episode, China will now have to embark upon a major damage limitation exercise," said a senior International Olympic Committee (IOC) member. "This has really come at the wrong time."

China took the 1994 world championships by storm, winning 12 of the 16 women's titles at stake. But at the Asian Games in Japan a few months later, seven Chinese swimmers, including two world champions, tested positive for banned steroids.

After a period of unofficial self-exile, China re-emerged in 1996 and again astounded rivals with two world records and a string of top times at the Chinese national games in Shanghai last October.

Yuan Yuan was 200m breaststroke silver medalist at the 1994 world championships. But was eighth and last in her heat at the Atlanta Olympics.

Chinese State Sports Commission spokesman Lu Kewen told AFP that Zhou had put the substance in the baggage "which happens all the time when a coach travels with his swimmers."

Top Australian swimmers called for a life ban for the use of human growth hormones however.

Keiren Perkins, Olympic champion and world record holder for the 1,500 metres freestyle, said: "If this is true it is the ultimate in stupidity. They are an obvious cheat and should be outed for life, no leniency."

China to be allowed to stay at World Championships

PERTH (AFP) — China's team will be allowed to stay at the world swimming championships, the sport's ruling body said Friday in response to calls for China's exclusion over its latest drug controversy.

"The FINA bureau decided not to take any action against the whole Chinese team, because we have not found any reasons to do that," said FINA secretary Gunnar Werner.

The executive bureau met Friday after China's Yuan Yuan and her coach Zhou Zhewen were ordered home over the discovery of a banned human growth hormone in her luggage.

Forbes Carlile, executive director of the World Association of Swimming Coaches, and Australia's former world champion Tracey Wickham have both called for China to be expelled from the world championships in Perth.

At a two hour meeting late Friday, FINA decided to refer Yuan and Zhou to its doping committee which could ban them for four years.

Werner said "trafficking of the growth hormone contravenes FINA's rules and the bureau has decided to refer its case to its doping panel with action to be taken under FINA rules."

Werner confirmed that the entire Chinese team had been drug tested at the championships and said he expected the results to be known within 24 hours.



United States swimmer Brooke Bennett in action during a training session at Challenge Pool, venue for the 8th World Swimming Championships in Perth. The swimming events at the championships begin January 12 (Reuters photo)



Chinese swimming coaches Li Wang (R) and Yongming Lu chat poolside during their team training session for the 8th World Swimming Championships in Perth January 9 (Reuters photo)

AC Milan humiliate Inter Milan 5-0

MILAN (AFP) — Ronaldo's Inter Milan crashed to a humiliating 5-0 defeat to archrivals AC Milan in the first leg of their Italian Cup quarter-final here Thursday night.

Demetrio Albertini scored a penalty. Maurizio Ganz took revenge on the club who sold him last month by adding Milan's second and Dejan Savicevic scored a third — all before the break.

Inter defender Francesco Colonnese scored an own-goal just after the re-start and Norwegian Steinar Nilsen, in only his second

game for Milan, cracked home a 30-yard free-kick to make it 5-0.

Milan, who were down at the relegation zone earlier this season, dominated the league title favourites, while Inter's midfield were hopelessly ineffective and their back four played like rank amateurs.

The second-leg is now a formality for Milan, who must wait only to find out whether they face either Parma or Atalanta for a place in the final.

"We were a much better side in the first half," said

Milan coach Fabio Capello. "We played great football, we played hard and fast, and we kept our concentration. It was a superb performance."

Inter coach Gigi Simoni said: "I don't whether after beating Juventus, people weren't so motivated for the Italian Cup, or what. Milan

got off to a good start, they were really motivated and they played very well. "It's hard to explain a game like this, you just don't expect it. But he added: "It's a lesson for us... we've got to use this to get fired up against Piacenza in the league this weekend."

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Jordan's Ghosheh 21st in 5-kilometre open water event

By a Jordan Times Staff Reporter

JORDAN'S RANIA Ghosheh started competition at the World Swimming Championships in Perth, Australia by taking part in the 5 kilometre open water swim off Perth's northern beaches over the weekend.

Ghosheh clocked 1 hour 36.38 minutes and came in 21st in the first such participation for swimmers of the Kingdom's national teams.

The United States won the event followed by Russia and Italy. Jordan was the only Arab country taking part — a fact greatly appreciated by the International Swimming Federation FINA who have sponsored Jordan's participation.

Ghosheh 15, and teammate Hana Majaj, 14, are Jordan's only representatives in the high profile championship bringing together the best of the world's swimmers.

They will both compete in the pool events which begin today and continue until Jan. 18.

The Jordan Swimming Federation (JSF) decided to send the two in a move to show "their appreciation for their efforts and achievements."

"Ghosheh and Majaj have proved to be the best in Jordan especially after their achievement in the last Pan-Arab Games which was held in Lebanon last August," said JSF vice president Tala' at Al Nasser.

Majaj who took Jordan's only swimming bronze medal in Beirut expressed her happiness to be representing Jordan in an international event.

Majaj took third place in Beirut with a time of 2:32m in the 200m butterfly and Ghosheh took fifth place with 1:14m in the 100 backstroke, only one second apart from the fourth and third places.

Both swimmers hope that experience gained at such an international event will help them prepare for the next Pan-Arab Games which will be held in Amman 1999.

GOREN BRIDGE

WITH OMAR SHARIF & TANIAH HIRSH

DECEPTIVELY CORRECT

East-West vulnerable. West deals.

NORTH
♠ KQ4
♥ Q4
♦ Q863
♣ Q52

WEST
♠ 65
♥ 109832
♦ 97
♣ AK109

EAST
♠ J1098
♥ 8
♦ AJ1054
♣ J75

SOUTH
♠ A732
♥ AK775
♦ K2
♣ 84

The bidding:
West Pass
North 2♠
East Pass
South 3NT
West Pass

Opening lead: Ten of ♠

When you make a deceptive play in the middle game, you usually have a pretty shrewd idea of how the cards lie. When you try it on opening lead, you need a large slice of luck and a specific lie of the cards. On this hand from the recent Spring North American Cham-

ionships in Philadelphia, West struck gold.

The auction was straightforward. South showed a good minimum by rebidding two no trump (since North was a passed hand, two clubs, by partnership agreement, inquired about South's strength) and, with 11 points, North had an easy raise to game.

Sitting West was Jonathan Levine of New York. He was reluctant to lead away from one of his doubletons, and a lead into South's unannounced five-card suit didn't rate to be productive. Instead, West decided on the deceptive lead of the ten of clubs.

West hit upon the perfect time for funny business — dummy held queen fourth and declarer did not have the jack. As it was, had the game been played with glass cards declarer would have called for dummy's queen, then set up a ninth trick by forcing out the ace of diamonds.

As the cards lay, however, the right play was actually to play low from the table on the ten, and duck again when West continued with the nine. There followed in rapid succession the ace and king of clubs and ace of diamonds, and East-West wrapped up 11 of 12 match-points for down one.

TODAY AT	CINEMA TEL:634134 PHILADELPHIA "1" George Clooney & Nicole Kidman ... in THE PEACEMAKER Shows: 12:15, 2:15, 6:30, 8:30, 10:30	CINEMA TEL:634134 PHILADELPHIA "2" Winona Rider & Anne Bancroft ... in AMERICAN QUILT Shows: 12:15, 2:15, 6:30, 8:30, 10:30	CINEMA TEL:699238 PLAZA SCREAM Shows: 12:00, 6:30 AL MASEER (Arabic) Nour Al Sharif Shows: 8:30, 10:45 HERCULES Shows: 2:00 p.m.	CINEMA TEL:677420 CONCORD CONCORD "1" MR. BEAN Shows: 12:15, 2:15 MURDER 1600 Shows: 6:30, 8:30, 10:30 CONCORD "2" MR. BEAN Shows: 6:30, 8:30, 10:30	CINEMA TEL:07913430 GALLERIA 2 ABDOUN Demi Moore ... in THE JUROR Shows: 8:30, 10:30 GEORGE OF THE JUNGLE Shows: 2:00, 6:30	CINEMA TEL:07933430 GALLERIA 1 ABDOUN Jim Carie... in THE CABLE GUY Shows: 2:00, 6:30, 8:30, 10:30	Hisham Yanes Theatre TEL: 625155 NOW ON DAILY THE GOVERNMENT IN THE SERVICE OF PEOPLE Starring Hisham Yanes and Amal Dabbas For reservations call: 640155, 625155
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Sonics, Jazz win

CLEVELAND (AP) — Vin Baker scored 25 points as the Seattle SuperSonics shut down Shawn Kemp and overwhelmed the Cleveland Cavaliers 109-84 Thursday night in the first matchup between Kemp and his former team.

A few moments after Kemp shook hands with his teammates of eight years, the Sonics proved why they might be an even better team without him. The Sonics improved their National Basketball Association-best record to 28-6 with their seventh straight victory and most lopsided win of the year.

Kemp, traded to Cleveland last summer in a three-team trade that brought Baker to Seattle, was held to 2-for-11 shooting and nine points. Gary Payton scored 25 points on 9-for-12 shooting for Seattle.

New Jersey Nets 89, Orlando Magic 87: In East Rutherford, Kerry Kittles had a season-high 27 points and a career-high 12 rebounds as the new jersey nets snapped a two-game losing streak.

Keith Van Horn snapped out of mini-slump by adding 19 points and Jayson Williams grabbed eight of his 15 rebounds in the fourth quarter when he held Rony Seikaly scoreless.

Seikaly finished with 25 points and 12 rebounds as the injury-riddled Magic lost for the 10th time in 12 games. Vernon Maxwell added 15 points off the bench, but fellow Orlando guard Darrell Armstrong finished 2-of-15 from the field, missing his final 12 shots.

Sacramento Kings 103, Dallas Mavericks 92: In Dallas, Olden Polynice set season-highs with 26 points and 16 rebounds as the Sacramento Kings extended their season-long winning streak to four games.

Polynice scored eight points as the Kings took control by outscoring the Mavs 28-15 in the second quarter for a 33-42 halftime lead.

Samaki Walker kept the



Indiana Pacers' Antonio Davis slams past the Houston Rockets during second quarter action, January 8. The Rockets were hosting the Pacers at the Compaq Center in Houston (Reuters photo)

Mavericks competitive with 18 first-half points, but he scored only two points in the second half.

Dennis Scott scored 23 points and Michael Finley had 16 points and 10 rebounds for the Mavs, who were playing for the first time since snapping a 15-game losing streak Tuesday by beating Denver.

Mitch Richmond scored 18 points for the Kings. Indiana Pacers 87, Houston Rockets 80: In Houston, Jalen Rose scored 18 points as the Indiana Pacers beat the injury-riddled Houston Rockets for their 11th win in 14 games.

The Pacers, off to their

best ever in the NBA under rookie coach Larry Bird, pulled within a half-game of Central Division-leading Chicago.

Kevin Willis had 32 points and 11 rebounds for the Rockets, who have lost seven of their last 10.

Houston played without injured stars Hakeem Olajuwon, Charles Barkley and Clyde Drexler. Reserve Eddie Johnson also wasn't available because of an injured right elbow, leaving the Rockets with only nine players.

Utah Jazz 116, Milwaukee Bucks 109: In Salt Lake City, Karl Malone scored 39 points and the

Utah Jazz shot 66 per cent from the field to beat the Milwaukee Bucks.

Malone, who started his 500th consecutive game, was 13-for-16 from the field and 13-for-15 from the foul line. Malone's free throw 2:04 into the game gave him 26,396 career points, passing John Havlicek for eighth place on the NBA's career scoring list.

Jeff Hornacek added 20 points for the Jazz, including 15 in the second quarter, and John Stockton had 13 assists.

Terrell Brandon scored a season-high 29 points for Milwaukee.

Slovakia stun Australia to reach Hopman final

PERTH (AFP) — Rank outsiders Slovakia reached the final of the A\$900,000 Australian Hopman Cup tennis tournament here late Thursday when they stunned fourth-seeded Australia 2-1.

The competition's top seeds, Spain, missed out on a place in the final despite beating Sweden 2-1 in their last qualifying match.

Karol Kucera and Karina Habsudova qualified for Saturday's final at the Burswood Dome here, lining Slovakia up for a shot at the winner's prize of A\$220,000 (\$143,000). Slovakia clinched the tie against Australia when Kucera and Habsudova combined superbly to beat World No. 2 Patrick Rafter and Annabel Ellwood in the deciding mixed doubles.

Kucera and Habsudova won 7-5, 6-2 in 62 minutes after the singles rubbers were shared.

Slovakia, who were forced to play in a preliminary clash with Romania to qualify for the eight-nation tournament, will meet second-seeded France or South Africa, the third seeds, in the final. France's Cedric Pioline and Mary Pierce and South Africa's Wayne Ferreira and Amanda Coetzer clash Friday in a virtual semi-final.

Habsudova gave Slovakia a flying start with a comfortable victory over 19-year-old Ellwood.

Finding her composure after an atrocious start, trailing 0-3, Habsudova took eight games in a row to win 6-3, 6-3.

Then Rafter evened the match by beating a plucky Kucera in a three-set classic that lasted two-and-a-half hours and included two tie-breakers.

He finally won 7-6 (7/3).

3-6, 7-6 (7/3) after a remarkable first set in which the players broke service in the opening five games.

Rafter paid tribute to his 23-year-old opponent, at present 24th in world rankings.

In the other tie of the night, Arantxa Sanchez

Vicario gave Spain a wonderful start when she whipped Sweden's Asa Carlsson 6-1, 6-2 in the women's singles.

But Thomas Enqvist put Sweden on level terms by making short work of world number seven Carlos Moya.

Enqvist won 6-4, 6-1,

chalkling up his first victory in three appearances in the tournament.

Moya and Sanchez Vicario snatched the mixed doubles 6-3, 6-4, but their win in the match 2-1 was not good enough to guide Spain into the final.

Seles out of Australian Open

Graf, Kafelnikov, Novotna also miss event

SYDNEY (AFP) — Four-time winner Monica Seles Thursday withdrew from this month's Australian Tennis Open citing "personal reasons."

Seles joined fellow former World No. 1 Steffi Graf in missing the year's opening Grand Slam which starts in Melbourne on January 19. They have shared winning the Australian Open title eight times since 1988.

There was no other explanation given for Seles' withdrawal. However, her father and coach Karolj Seles has suffered deteriorating health because of stomach cancer.

Open tournament director Paul McNamee was philosophical at the loss of a second top drawcard and was unable to clarify reasons for the withdrawal.

"I don't want to speculate," McNamee said.

"I was disappointed. She's a four-time champion and a great friend of the tournament and Australia. She's never lost a singles match in Australia," he added.

Ranked No. 5, the 24-year-old Yugoslavian born naturalised-American would have been seeded fourth because World No. 2 Jana Novotna is also out along with another perennial contender, former finalist Mary Joe Fernandez.

The Open men's field has also lost a key player in former French Open winner Russian Yevgeny Kafelnikov.

He will miss the tournament for the second consecutive year after withdrawing on Wednesday with a knee injury.

SPORTS IN BRIEF

Maradona move to Napoli on ice

BUENOS AIRES (AFP) — Diego Maradona announced here on Thursday that he would not be thinking of joining Napoli "for the moment." The former World Cup star, who led Argentina to the 1986 trophy and to the final in 1990, has received overtures from a group opposed to club president Corrado Ferlaino, who wants him to become president in order to attract crowds and financial backing for the club, currently bottom of Serie A with just five points.

Maradona has said he would require "complete control" if he were to take over. During his seven seasons in Italy, Maradona helped Napoli to two league titles, and wins in the Italian Cup and UEFA Cup.

Young resigns as Giants manager

EAST RUTHERFORD (AFP) — Long-time New York Giants general manager George Young, who guided the National Football League franchise from nearly two decades of futility into a two-time Super Bowl champion, resigned Thursday to accept a high-ranking position with the league. "The timing is best for the organisation and the time is best for me (to leave)," said Young at a news conference at Giants Stadium. "It's right for me to feel the club here is in good hands and that's part of my decision. I believe this is the best thing for me to do." Young, 67, took over as Giants general manager in 1979. After Young drafted players such as Phil Simms, Lawrence Taylor and Mark Hayes, the Giants reached the playoffs in 1981 for the first time in 19 years.

French drugs trio suspended

PARIS (AFP) — French first division players Vincent Guerin, Antoine Sibierski and Dominique Arribage were Thursday suspended for six months for failing drugs tests. The trio were given further 12 months suspended sentences by the anti-doping commission of the French Football Federation. The three all returned positive tests for the anabolic steroid Nandrolone when tested after French League games. Guerin, who plays for Paris Saint Germain, Sibierski, who plays for Auxerre, and Arribage, who is with Toulouse, all said they plan to appeal against the decision. Under French federation rules, the players have 15 days in which to lodge their reasons for appeal.

Italian clubs chase Emerson

MIDDLESBROUGH (AFP) — Two Italian clubs have entered the race to sign Middlesbrough's out-of-favour Brazilian star Emerson. Middlesbrough manager Bryan Robson revealed on Thursday. The English first division club's talented midfield player has been linked with Tenerife for several weeks. But Robson confirmed the Spanish outfit are now facing competition from Italy for Emerson's signature. Robson said: "I am not prepared to name the Italian clubs at this stage, but they are in Serie A." Tenerife, though, have moved closer to agreement over a fee after renewed talks and Emerson could be given permission to talk to the Spanish first division club over the weekend.

United waiting for Poborsky money

MANCHESTER (AFP) — Manchester United revealed on Thursday that they have not yet received any of the reported £2 million (about \$3.4 million) transfer fee following the move of Czech international Karel Poborsky to Benfica. But United said the delayed payment was agreed

when the deal was struck, and the Portuguese side managed by Graeme Souness will pay United after they float on the stock exchange. "We've not received the transfer fee but there's nothing sinister in that," said United spokesman Ken Ramsden.

Mansell backing Hill and Jordan

LONDON (AFP) — Former Formula One world champion Nigel Mansell is backing Damon Hill, who has switched to Jordan from Arrows, to launch a major challenge to Jacques Villeneuve and Michael Schumacher in this year's championship. Mansell said Thursday: "Eddie (Jordan) did brilliantly last year in developing the car and with Damon on board it could make all the difference. "Jordan has had a policy of bringing young drivers through as test drivers and that has been one of the reasons for the success." Mansell, who is close to Jordan and nearly drove for the team last season, added: "Eddie and his team are ready to win and I think that will happen this year. They are up there with the top teams and will be a major threat. "They could put pressure on the others."

Johnson's Palace move under threat

LONDON (AFP) — Celtic striker Tommy Johnson's proposed loan switch to English Premiership side Crystal Palace could break down on a technicality, it emerged Thursday. The out-of-favour former Aston Villa forward has held talks with Palace manager Steve Coppell and is ready to complete a temporary move. The two clubs initially agreed a six-week loan period, but Coppell has been told the rules demand a three-month spell which would leave Johnson at Selhurst Park beyond the late March transfer deadline. Although a permanent transfer has not been ruled out, Palace are understood to be unwilling to make that commitment at this stage.

Olympic champion seriously ill

CHEMNITZ (AFP) — Former East German Olympic swimming champion Petra Kind-Schneider has heart and liver problems after years of drug abuse, doctor Werner Frank has told the Chemnitz Morgenpost newspaper in an interview that will appear on Friday. The Olympic 400m medley champion at the 1980 Moscow Games, who finished ahead of Britain's silver medalist Sharon Davies, said: "At the time, we had absolutely no idea of what was being given to us. I began to take (drugs) just after my 14th birthday."

Rusedski storms back to beat Alami

DOHA (AFP) — Britain's top-seed Greg Rusedski dropped his opening service game after breaking a racket string but stormed back to complete a 6-2, 7-5 victory over Moroccan Karim Alami and reach the quarter-finals of the \$1 million ATP event here Thursday. Rusedski, who once partnered Alami to win Junior Wimbledon, admitted after the win: "I didn't play my best and the conditions were difficult." The Canadian-born British player also said that the noise from the fans had made it "more like a football than a tennis match." At one stage in the opening set an increasingly-frustrated Alami was lucky to escape a warning after throwing his racket fiercely to the ground. Rusedski now meets Frenchman Fabrice Santoro who defeated Martin Sinner in straight-sets. Other winners were Andrei Medvedev of the Ukraine and Sjeng Schalken of the Netherlands. Medvedev put out American Jeff Tarango 6-2, 2-6, 7-5 while Schalken edged past Carlos Costa of Spain 7-5, 2-6, 7-6 (7/5).

Karpov, Anand in world championship tie-breaker

LAUSANNE (AFP) — Russian world chess champion Anatoly Karpov and his Indian challenger Viswanathan Anand were to play a tie-breaker after drawing the first six games of the World Chess Federation (FIDE) championship, officials said.

Viswanathan, considered a specialist at the series of high-speed games required in the tie-breaker, earned the tie-break by winning the sixth game Thursday to level the match at three all.

The winner of the tournament will pocket \$1.37 million. Anand is ranked third in the world, two places above Karpov.

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- * At least two years experience in Lotus Notes administration and troubleshooting.
- * Mastery of the English Language.
- * Mastery of Microsoft software (Windows 95 Operating System, MS Office applications, etc.)
- * Familiarity with Internet Explorer, Internet access, and Internet e-mail.
- * Ability to set up and configure hardware and software for networked personal computers operating under Windows 95, Windows for Workgroups, Windows 3.1 and Apple OS.
- * Ability to test installed applications on LAN servers and workstations.
- * Ability to test connectivity, Login scripts and passwords required to use the assigned server.
- * Ability to set up individual e-mail accounts and Internet connections as required.
- * Ability to resolve network printer problems and set up network printers and scanners.
- * Knowledge in web page design, web master experience is a plus.
- * Good knowledge of server and network hardware.
- * Experience with project management, information systems and database engineering.
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Massacres probe must accompany EU mission to Algiers — rights groups

BRUSSELS (AFP) — A European Union mission to Algeria must be accompanied by an inquiry into the massacres that have left at least 600 dead already this year, international human rights groups said on Friday.

Jean-Paul Marthoz, Brussels director of the U.S.-based Human Rights Watch (HRW), said it was vital that the EU mission not be used as a "smokescreen" by the international community to sidestep the issue of responsibility for the killings.

"It is very important that this mission is not considered a substitute for a thorough international inquiry under the auspices of the United Nations," Mr. Marthoz said.

"It must not be limited to discussing humanitarian aid or support for the government's campaign to suppress the armed opposition groups."

The EU mission, agreed in principle on Thursday, will be the first major international intervention in the Algerian conflict since the civil war began in 1992, when the military seized power as Islamist parties seemed poised for victory in general elections.

The call for an U.N. inquiry was launched jointly by Amnesty International, HRW, the International Federation of Human Rights Leagues (IFHRL), and the press watchdog Reporters sans Frontières.

The organisations said an inquiry into the massacres should be charged with establishing the facts — which are cloudy because of the Algerian government's stranglehold on the press and its refusal to allow international observers into the country.

The Algerian government insists that the killings are all the work of Islamist forces.

But the human rights groups said there was strong evidence that government forces were either directly implicated in some of the incidents or had opted to turn a blind eye.

"In a certain number of cases it is clear the forces of law and order have not responded to appeals for help from the population," said Robert Menard of Reporters sans Frontières.

The rights groups called the U.S. and the EU to apply pressure on the Algerian government to immediately facilitate a visit by the U.N. special rapporteurs on extrajudicial killings, as a first step towards a full inquiry.

The U.S. and the EU were also urged to jointly sponsor a resolution at the U.N. Human Rights Commission's annual meeting in March to establish a special rapporteur on the situation in Algeria.

Abdullah Baali, Algeria's ambassador to the United Nations, said Thursday the international body has no role to play in Algeria, and rejected a Washington-proposed inquiry on the civilian massacres.

Mr. Baali said Algerian officials objected to a U.N. inquiry because "that would mean there are doubts over who is responsible for the massacres, while everyone knows who they are."

Some 600 people have reportedly died in a string of massacres in Algeria since Dec. 30.

Such atrocities are routinely blamed on Islamists defying Mr. Zeroual's regime, six years after the military cancelled elections that Islamists were set to win.

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Arab League rejects foreign 'interference' in Algeria

CAIRO (AFP) — The Arab League said Friday it opposed interference in Algerian internal affairs after Western leaders proposed taking action against the bloody campaign of terror there.

"We reject any interference in Algeria's internal affairs and do not accept any attempt to intervene," said Ahmad Ben Helli, the League's assistant secretary general for Arab affairs.

"The Algerian people can resolve their problems on their own and destroy the scourge of terrorism. If Western countries want to help Algeria, they should close their doors to the terrorist leaders whom they welcome," Mr. Helli said after European leaders

urged the League to join an international attempt to stop the bloodshed.

However, an Arab League envoy will go to Algiers Sunday with a message for Algerian President Liamine Zeroual, Mr. Helli added.

The emissary "will discuss with Zeroual what role the League could play in helping Algeria deal with the scourge of terrorism," he said.

Arab League Secretary General Esmat Abdul Meguid telephoned President Zeroual Thursday and assured him of the 22-member Arab organisation's "solidarity and support" for Algeria's "fight against terrorism."

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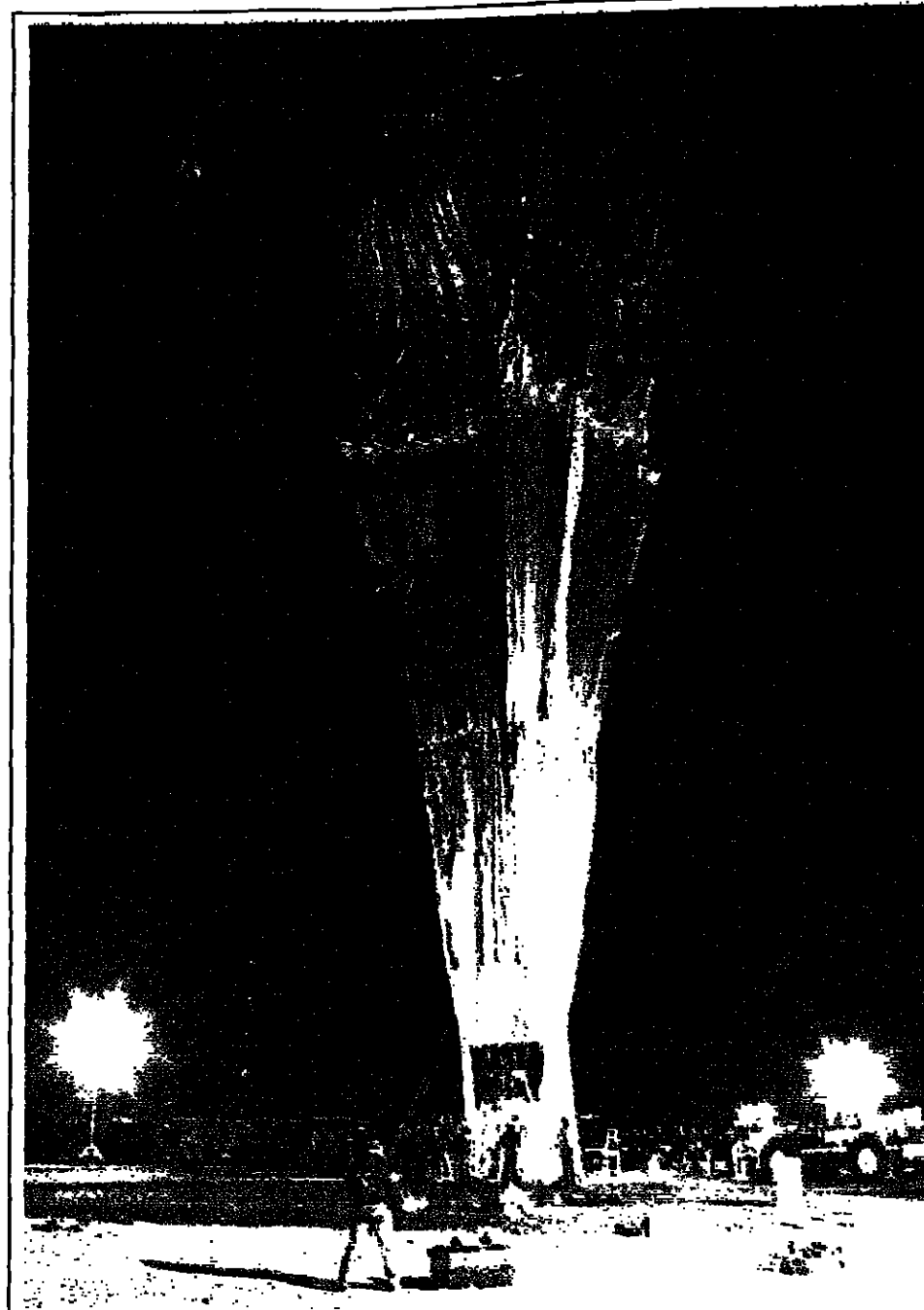
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ANOTHER ATTEMPT AROUND THE WORLD IN A BALLOON HURDLED: The crew capsule is attached to the partially inflated Rozier balloon, Global Hilton, in Albuquerque, New Mexico, Friday. The balloon was launched shortly before dawn, but just a few hours after launching the helium container on the craft ruptured and the balloon will have to be brought down soon. Commander Dick Rutan and pilot Dave Melton had hoped to become the first to fly a balloon around the world non-stop (Reuters photo)

Turkey slams EU view on Kurdish refugee influx

ANKARA (AFP) — Turkey's police chief has slammed counterparts from several European Union (EU) countries for refusing squarely to blame the Kurdish rebel movement for a wave of Kurdish immigrants to western Europe.

Police Chief Necati Bilican said Turkey rejected a statement that came at the end of a meeting in Rome Thursday between himself and the top police officers from seven EU countries, the Anatolian news agency reported Friday.

"The PKK [the Separatist Kurdish Labour Party] and networks involved in smuggling immigrants are the source of the problem," Mr. Bilican insisted.

Hundreds of illegal immigrants — mostly Turkish and Iraqi Kurds — have entered Italy by boat in recent months, with over 1,200 arriving in two boatloads within the last two weeks.

According to Italian interior ministry figures, a total of 2,646 Kurds have illegally entered Italy since July, 366 of whom have requested political asylum.

But while Mr. Bilican and the other delegates "could not reach a total convergence of views on the role of organised crime networks involved in smuggling immigrants," the Turkish police

chief said he supported several joint agreements reached in the